

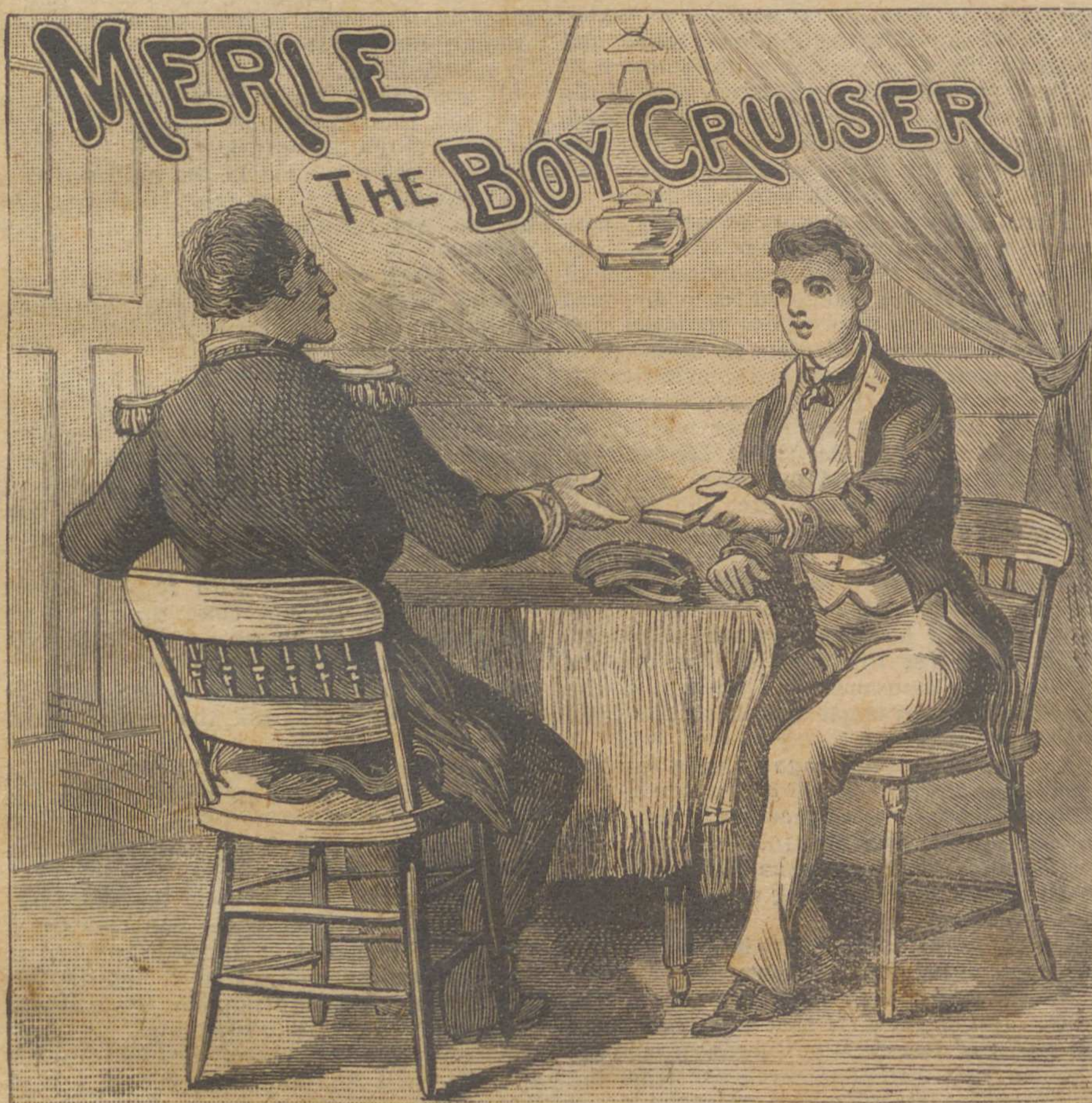
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CAPTAIN MEREDITH, MOTIONED THE YOUNG OFFICER TO A SEAT, AND, THROWING HIMSELF INTO HIS OWN EASY-CHAIR, HELD FORTH HIS HAND FOR THE DISPATCHES,

Merle, the Boy Cruiser;

OR,

BRANDT, THE BUCCANEER.

A Stirring Tale of the Sea.

BY COL. PRENTISS INGRAHAM,
AUTHOR OF "MERLE, THE MIDDY," "THE
COWBOY CAPTAIN," "THE BOY COM-
MANDER," ETC., ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I.

THE YOUNG SAILOR AND HIS SHADOW.

A CURIOUS throng was gazing upon a trim, rakish craft that lay at anchor a cable's length off-shore, in the Potomac River, and within sight of the capital of our country.

Boats were running constantly around the pretty vessel, and the curious-minded were talking in suppressed tones, as their eyes roamed over the saucy little craft from her quaint hull to her needle-like topmasts.

That there was some story or mystery connected with the schooner thus lying quietly at anchor in the Potomac was evident, for of the larger vessels anchored near by, and cruisers that had won names upon the high seas, none received the earnest attention of the one upon which every eye seemed riveted.

The secret was that the schooner was a captured pirate, and her former master, the famous Brandt, the Buccaneer, lay between her decks, ironed hand and foot, and only waiting for his captors to give the order to string him up to the yard-arm as punishment for his many crimes.

Under a prize crew the schooner, fleet as the wind, and which long had been the terror of the Gulf had been brought into port, and at once had the news of her capture spread, and thousands had flocked to the Potomac's shores to get a look at the little outlaw craft.

And the story went round that a boy had been her captor.

Some said he was a fisher-boy living upon an island in the Mexican Gulf.

Others said that he was the daring son of a Mexican ranchero dwelling upon the shores of that country.

And more had it also that he was a cabin-boy upon an American cruiser.

Which report was right the sequel will show; but certain it is that a boy had been the captor of Brandt, the Buccaneer, and his schooner, and had come on in her from the Gulf as acting second officer under the junior lieutenant, who had been sent in command of the prize and the prisoners.

The name of this young Pirate-Hunter was

Merle Monte, it was said, and he had been made a midshipman in the United States Navy and ordered back to the Gulf to join a vessel there whose duties were to put down smuggling and piracy in those waters.

Those who had seen Merle Monte, represented him to be a tall, splendidly-formed youth of perhaps fifteen, with an exceedingly handsome, daring face, and always accompanied by a black slave, dressed in Persian garb, and evidently an Abyssinian.

While the crowd on the Potomac shores, and in the numerous small boats upon the waters, was gazing upon the schooner with the same rapt attention in which they had stood for hours, and discussing the pirate and his captor, there was an excited movement in the outer edge of the throng, and passing through it came a youth, followed by a huge black.

It was Merle Monte, and his slave, Mezrak, and their appearance caused a murmur to run through the crowd.

The youth was clad in the uniform of a midshipman, which was most becoming, and his face won the admiration of all who gazed upon it.

The black slave, in his foreign garb and turban, also attracted universal attention, with fear and curiosity commingled, and no admiration.

His form was massive, and deformed by the length of his body and arms, the size of his head and the shortness of his legs; but there was that in his movement to indicate that he had the strength of a lion, agility of a panther, and courage of a tiger, with human cunning and intellect to make him a most formidable foe.

The crowd gave way with respect before the youth, and did not close up closely on the Abyssinian as he passed, and many politely saluted the young sailor, which salutes he acknowledged by raising his cap.

Reaching the river-bank, the youth shouted in ringing tones:

"Ho! the schooner ahoy!"

"Ay, ay, sir!" came an answer from the officer of the deck.

"Kindly send a boat ashore, if you please."

"Ay, ay, sir!" came back the response, and in five minutes after the schooner's gig, with two oarsmen and a coxswain touched at the bank, and springing into it lightly, followed by his slave, Midshipman Merle Monte gave orders to return to the vessel.

Patiently the crowd watched and waited; and after half an hour had passed, beheld the midshipman and his black shadow again come ashore and disappear in the direction of the city, just as the twilight was deepening into darkness.

CHAPTER II.

THE CABIN-BOY.

PACING the deck amidships of the captured pirate vessel, was a youth in sailor dress.

He was neatly attired in duck pants, blue woolen shirt, tarpaulin and pumps, and had a jaunty air about him, though a sad, pale face.

His features were regular, and his face handsome; but there was something about him that seemed to show he was out of place on a vessel-of-war.

He had enlisted on board the American cruiser Sea Wolf, when it had touched at Havana, and been assigned to duty as a cabin-boy; but when Captain Meredith had sent the pirate schooner north under a prize crew, he had begged to go in her, and as he looked in ill-health his request had been granted.

He answered to the name of Little Belt, which he said he had been called on account of the smallness of his waist, and other than his own statement that he had come to sea to make a living and was an American, nothing was known regarding his former career.

He had turned quickly at the hail of Merle, the Middy, from the Potomac's bank, and watched his coming on board with an earnest regard that denoted deep interest.

When the young midddy had gone into the cabin with the lieutenant in command, and his brother officers, to tell them good-by, as he started to rejoin the Sea Wolf in the Gulf the following day, Little Belt had immediately followed them into the cabin and seemed intent upon some duties there.

As soon as the midddy had departed, he watched him out of sight, and then carried into the cabin the supper of the young officers, after which he went into the wardroom, bearing in his hands a tray containing the evening meal of Brandt, the Buccaneer, for it was his duty to wait upon him.

Seated upon a low chair, ironed hand and foot, was a man of really majestic presence, a face that would seem little likely to be that of a pirate chief.

He was attired in a Mexican undress uniform, and gazed calmly at the boy as he entered.

"Well, lad, a few more days, and I will trouble you no more," said the buccaneer, in a deep, but by no means unpleasant voice.

"You mean that you will soon be hanged at the yard-arm for your crimes," said the boy.

"Yes, that is just what I mean," was the almost indifferent reply.

"You will not be hanged this time."

"Ha! am I to suffer other punishment than hanging?" quickly asked the man.

"No; you are condemned to death at the yard-arm, but I intend to save you."

"*You intend to save me?*" asked the chief, speaking in a low, slow tone.

"Yes."

"Boy, you have a good heart, but weak hands."

"I have a will to accomplish that which I undertake," was the firm response.

"You speak boldly."

"I mean what I say."

"That I shall not be strung up this time to the yard-arm?"

"Yes; not *this* time."

"How can you help it?"

"I have formed a plan to save you."

The man started, and, reaching forth his ironed hands, tried to seize the boy and draw him closer to him that he might the better see his face in the dim light shed by the battle-lantern. But the cabin-boy eluded his grasp by springing back quickly.

"Who are you, boy?" asked the chief, dropping his outstretched hands.

"A cabin-boy."

"Your name?"

"Little Belt."

"That is not your true name."

"It is the one by which I am known here."

"That means that you will not tell me?"

"Yes."

"Well, tell me why you have eluded my every effort to see your face?"

"It matters not *now*."

"Have we ever met before?"

"Yes."

"Have I befriended you in some way in the past?"

"Yes, you have and I wish to pay off the score, the debt I owe you, Brandt Brentford," was the savage reply.

"Ha! you do know me, for you call me by my name!"

"Yes; I know you in all your vileness."

"And yet you would save me, you say?"

"Yes."

"You are a mystery, boy; knowing me to be guilty of piracy, you yet would not see me die?" said the perplexed pirate.

"You are mistaken, sir, for I would not see you die where others have brought you to the gallows."

"Your words smack of revenge against me yourself," said Brandt, quickly, and in vain trying to get a good look at the face of the youth.

"You are right, for I am revengeful, and I intend to save you from death now, to have you, in the end, come to the gallows, or a more horrible death, through my instrumentality."

"In Heaven's name who are you?" cried the pirate chief.

"That you will know all too soon for your future peace of mind."

"It is now the supper hour, and by midnight I will come here and free you."

"Do this for me, boy, and I will reward you richly," eagerly said Brandt.

"My reward shall be my revenge."

"I will not fail you," and the cabin-boy turned and left the cabin without another word.

CHAPTER III.

FOR REVENGE.

DURING the daytime there was no guard kept over the pirate chief and his crew; but at night a sailor was made sentinel on duty, and paced the deck, from the spot forward where the men were in irons, to the state-room in which Brandt was a prisoner.

As the prize crew was small, there were only a few men on watch, and a middy held the deck toward midnight, and passed the dragging hours away by leaning over the bulwarks and watching the lights of the city.

Forward in the fore-castle the three men on watch were chatting together, unmindful of anything going on of an uncommon nature on board.

The lieutenant commanding the schooner had gone ashore early to attend the theater, and had dismissed his gig, saying he would come off in a shore-boat.

Along with him went the cabin-boy, Little Belt, who had begged a few hours' leave on shore.

Several hours had thus passed away, when the midshipman officer of the deck spied a boat coming off toward the schooner, and muttered:

"The luff is coming aboard early."

Soon after he hailed the approaching boat, and there came back the answer:

"Ay, ay, sir, I have a letter for you from the lieutenant."

"That's Little Belt's voice; what's up, I wonder?" muttered the middy, and then he called out:

"Come alongside!"

There were two oarsmen in the boat, and three men who were in uniform and carried muskets, as the middy saw, when the latter followed Little Belt over the gangway.

The cabin-boy walked straight up to the middy, and saluting politely, said:

"The lieutenant sent you this letter, sir."

"Anything wrong, Belt?" asked the youthful officer, as he stepped to where the light coming from the cabin companionway would fall upon the letter.

"A sudden move to be made, I believe, sir," answered Belt.

Opening the letter, the middy read aloud;

"ASHORE, 9:30 P. M."

"MIDSHIPMAN VALE, Commanding Pirate Prize Schooner:—

"Sir:—You will place in the charge of the officer, and two marines accompanying him, the Pirate Chief Brandt, who is to be taken to prison on shore."

"Also have the other prisoners ready to be sent ashore at daybreak, as I have orders to run the schooner to Baltimore for repairs."

Breaking off in the letter, the middy called out:

"Belt, go below and bid the guard bring the pirate, Brandt, on deck, and in double irons!"

The boy quickly disappeared below, and the middy, after finishing the perusal of the letter, which was of no further importance, advanced to the officer of marines and entered into conversation with him until the clanking of chains announced the coming of the prisoner.

"Here is your man, lieutenant, and I suppose he will not be long in your care," said the middy, a significant remark, which Brandt heard and fully understood the meaning of.

The marines placed the prisoner quickly in the boat, their officer waved adieu, and Little Belt was following, when the middy sung out:

"Hold on, Belt! If you go ashore again I'll miss my midnight supper."

"The lieutenant told me to return, sir, for he has some bundles to bring off," was the ready reply.

"All right; I'll forage on the mess locker myself, then," and the middy stood leaning over the bulwarks, while the boat pulled shoreward.

Getting close in under the shadow of the land, the course of the boat was changed, the bow being headed down-stream until Greenleaf's Point* was rounded, when it was turned up the Eastern Branch.

Here the two marines in uniform seized extra oars, and the light boat shot ahead at a rapid pace, running swiftly past the navy-yard, gliding under the bridge on the Upper Marlboro' Road, and soon landing at a point near Prospect Hill.

"Here, sir, we leave you," said the man in the dress of a marine lieutenant.

"Yes, for there comes the man with the horses."

"The keys, please?" said the cabin-boy.

As he spoke a man approached, leading two saddle-horses, and the marine officer handed a bunch of keys to Little Belt, who bade Brandt hold out his hands.

The chief, who had not uttered a word since leaving the schooner, silently obeyed, and in an instant he was freed of the heavy

*Then so called.

irons that were upon his wrists and ankles, and after a little difficulty, sprung on shore, for he was cramped and stiff from his imprisonment.

"Here is the balance of your pay, sir, and you can divide with your men," said Little Belt, throwing a large purse of gold into the hands of the officer.

"Thank you, my lad, and good-luck to you. Now, boys, let us shuck these duds and pull back to the town, for we must be abed by dawn," said the officer.

Instantly off came false beards, and the uniforms the three had worn, and they appeared in ordinary dress, and the man who had approached with the horses, yielding the reins to Little Belt, sprung into the boat, which at once shoved off, and started downstream, leaving Brandt the buccaneer and Little Belt standing alone on the bank.

"Well, it seems you have kept your word.

"You are a remarkable youth," said the chief, as the boat disappeared in the gloom.

"Thank you."

"No, it is I that owe you thanks, my lad, for you have indeed saved me from the gal-lows."

"I know I have."

"And that was a most cleverly played deed, my boy, well worthy of older heads.

"You hired those men, I suppose?"

"I did."

"Then I owe you gold as well as grati-tude?"

"No, you owe me nothing."

"But you will at least permit me to repay you what you have paid out for me?"

"No, I will not."

"I have a small fortune in jewels upon me, which my captors did not find, and gladly I will share them with you."

"No, I would not touch your gold or jewels. I have set you free because I hate you, and wish to be the one who shall cause your death. A vessel sails from Baltimore to-morrow for New Orleans, and you can catch her, for these are good horses. I will go with you, but after reaching Baltimore we are as strangers, remember, though I now swear to dog your steps to the bitter end."

The youth spoke in a low earnest tone, and with a light laugh Brandt replied:

"As you please, my lad. I care not for your threats, or your hatred, though I thank you heartily for setting me free and saving my neck from the noose. I know a vessel that should sail about this time, and if it is the one I think, she is richly freighted, and already I have a score of good fellows on board of her, and shall ride hard to catch her. Come, let us mount and away, if you go with me."

The youth nimbly sprung into the saddle,

the chief more slowly mounting, and rounding Prospect Hill, the two men turned into the Baltimore turnpike, and dashed away at a quick gallop.

CHAPTER IV.

TREACHERY.

FOLLOWING the directions given him, to "stick to the turnpike," Little Belt led the way toward Baltimore, remaining silent when addressed by Brandt, the Buccaneer.

"Better drop your ill-will toward me, my lad, and ship with me on the craft I know my boys have secured, and I'll make a junior officer of you," said Brandt, after several of his remarks to the youth had remained un-answered.

"No, I'll not be treacherous to you, for I give you fair warning I will hunt you down," was the low reply.

The pirate seemed deeply impressed by the decided manner and determined hatred of the boy toward him, and said, after a while:

"You will not tell me who you are?"

"Not now."

"Nor how I have wronged you?"

"Not now."

"Some day you will?"

"Yes."

"When?"

"When I have you in my power, and I know that my hand has led you to your death."

"Well, you certainly have taken a great deal of trouble and risk, and spent your gold freely to set me free, when, if my death was what you want, you could have enjoyed seeing me triced up to the yard-arm in a few days."

"I would not have been the one that brought that death upon you."

"Ah! that is your great desire?"

"Yes."

"You'll never see me hanged, my lad."

"I will see you die."

"No, I think not. But this trifling has gone far enough. Tell me who and what you are."

"I will not."

"Then I shall find out."

Quick as a flash the chief bent forward and seized a pistol that was stuck in the belt of the boy, and though the two horses sprung forward each retained his seat in the saddle, and yet grappled each other with seeming deadly determination.

Away bounded the horses at a run, frightened at the fierce struggle going on between their riders, and presently there came a flash, report and a cry, and falling backward, the cabin-boy dropped with a heavy thud to the ground.

On ran his horse, and by his side the ani-

mal that held the chief, from whose set lips came the words:

"I hated to kill him, but better his life than mine, and he had sworn to kill me."

It was some time before the chief could check the flight of his frightened steed; but at last he brought him down to a slow canter, and wheeling to the rightabout, went back toward where his victim lay motionless where he had fallen.

"Now I'll solve the mystery as to who this boy is," he muttered, as he dismounted, and hitching his horse, approached the prostrate form.

Bending over him, by the starlight, he gazed earnestly into his face.

He had in his pocket his tinder-box, for smoking had been his solace while in irons on board the schooner, and quickly he ignited a taper, and a light shone full into the white face.

A bitter curse broke from the man's lips, and he dropped the light, while his hands were thrust into the open jacket, as though searching for papers, or gold.

But, with a cry that rung through the dark forests upon either side of the road, he sprung to his feet and fairly tottered toward his horse.

Several fruitless attempts he made to mount, for he seemed strengthless from some sudden shock; but at last he got into the saddle and dashed away like the wind, just as the rumble of wheels, and rapid tramp of hoofs indicated the approach of the stage-coach on the way to Baltimore.

CHAPTER V.

SAD AND GLAD TIDINGS.

THE morning after the escape of the famous buccaneer chief all Washington was a scene of intense excitement, and the wildest rumors were afloat regarding the one who had aided him in regaining his freedom.

The lieutenant commanding the schooner had returned on board after midnight, when another midday was on duty than the one who had received the supposed letter ordering the pirate to be sent ashore, and hence nothing was said about it until the officers met at breakfast, when the startling news fell like a bombshell upon all, for at once it was made known by the young lieutenant that he had sent no such order.

The midday tremblingly produced the letter, which was a fair copy of his superior's hand, as he was compelled to confess.

"Who brought this?" he asked, in hoarse tones.

"Little Belt."

"That cabin-boy?"

"Yes, sir."

"I always felt there was something mysterious about that boy, and now I know it."

"He was from the Sea Wolf, though, sir."

"True; but Captain Meredith also felt the boy had a history, for we have often talked about him. Well, he has helped that fiend, Brandt, to escape, that is certain, and I must go and make report to the admiral. Who was on duty last night?"

The sailor guard was at once summoned.

"Brace, did you see the cabin-boy, Belt, talking with the prisoners?" asked the lieutenant.

"No more, sir, than to take them their vittals three times a day."

"You never thought there was any wrong in the boy, did you, Brace?"

"Not a mite, sir, for he was full of goodness," was the ready answer.

With a heavy heart the lieutenant and midday, armed with the letter, went to make report to the admiral, and half an hour after the whole town was alarmed, and the guards were scouring the country in all directions in search of the escaped pirate.

But the day passed, and others, until weeks formed a month, and no tidings had come of Brandt, the Buccaneer, or of the daring cabin-boy, who, many now said, was also a pirate officer, who had shipped on board the American cruiser Sea Wolf for some reason best known to himself.

Then, one day, the mails came from New Orleans, and the papers contained the following information:

"The long-delayed packet ship between our city and Baltimore arrived in port yesterday, just as her agents and the public had begun to feel the greatest anxiety regarding her being overdue.

"And not without cause had been the anxiety, it seems, as the vessel has been for the last two weeks in the hands of that arch-fiend, Brandt, the Buccaneer, who, after having been captured and taken to Washington, made his escape, and in disguise took passage upon the vessel.

"It seems from what we could glean from the officers and passengers, that a party of pretended priests and Sisters of Charity took passage in the vessel upon her last trip north, and engaged their berths for the round voyage.

"Now, it turns out that these pretended religious people were frauds of the deepest dye, for after leaving Baltimore, and arriving in the vicinity of the Bahamas, the leader suddenly threw off the cloak of religion he wore and came out in his true light.

"That true light was in his person of Brandt the Buccaneer, and his companions, the pretended priests and sisters, also cast

aside their robes, and were found to be a band of thoroughly armed seamen.

"There were on board, as passengers, a young midshipman by the name of Merle Monte, and his slave, a deformed Abyssinian who answered to the name of Mezrak.

"This middy, it seems, was the same who had taken prisoner Brandt, and gone north with him in his schooner, and was returning to his vessel, the Sea Wolf, or the packet-ship.

"Seeing how readily the vessel had been seized by Brandt and his buccaneers, and perhaps realizing that he need look for no mercy whatever at the hands of the pirates, he made a desperate and daring effort to escape, in which he was followed by the slave, Mezrak.

"Up into the rigging they went, though fired at by Brandt, and followed by half a dozen seamen, and fearlessly running out upon the yard-arm the boy, and then his slave, made a mighty leap upon the jutting point of rock, which the channel led the vessel almost to touch.

"They reached the rock in safety, but were afterward killed by the firing of the pirates, so it is said.

"The pirate captain felt so confident of their being killed, that he did not touch at the island to discover if they were or not, and held on his way.

"That way was to run down vessel after vessel with the fast-sailing packet, robbing each one of them, and then setting them free, with orders to spread the news that Brandt, the Buccaneer, was again afloat.

"After several captures along the Florida Coast he set signals of distress, as a revenue schooner was sighted, which ran down to him, when he boarded the unsuspecting little cruiser, and won her by his daring act after a short, fierce conflict.

"Then the pirate took all of value out of the packet, left the prisoners on board, and set sail for other scenes, and ere long we will again be made to tremble at the name of Brandt, the Buccaneer."

This was certainly startling tidings for the people of Washington, and the sad fate of the youthful hero, Midshipman Merle Monte, and his "shadow," was greatly deplored, and navy officers swore to avenge him if ever opportunity occurred.

But upon the heels of this news came another batch of New Orleans papers, one of which contained the tidings that the Sea Wolf had just come into port, and on board of her was none other than Merle Monte, the middy who had been reported dead.

He was still accompanied by his "shadow," and though he had been severely wounded by the fire of the pirates, he had not only survived, but had met on the island, upon

which he had so daringly sprung, a gang of cruel wreckers, who, after a desperate fight, had been killed, and their vessel taken as a prize by the bold youth.

As soon as he was able to depart, Midshipman Monte and Mezrak, had, after destroying the wreckers' false beacons, set sail in their little sloop for Vera Cruz, which port was reached in safety, and the Sea Wolf being then in the harbor, the gallant middy and his deformed slave had joined their vessel, which at once put to sea in pursuit of the captured packet-ship, but after a fruitless cruise had run into New Orleans to find the vessel there.

The paper furthermore stated that it was the intention of Captain Meredith of the Sea Wolf, to fit out at once, and go in search of the revenue cutter, which had been captured by Brandt, the Buccaneer, and it was the hope of every one that the famous rover would soon dance in mid-air from the end of the cruiser's yard-arm.

CHAPTER VI.

THE BUCCANEER CHIEF.

I WILL now return to Brandt, the Buccaneer, who, after his successful escape from death, through the act of Little Belt, the cabin-boy, had just reached Baltimore in time to sail upon the packet-ship upon which a part of his band had shipped in disguise, knowing well the value of the cargo the vessel was to carry out on that trip, through a spy in New Orleans, who kept an eye on the shipments of the agents.

When Brandt had laid his schooner up for a season, in a secret lagoon on the Mexican coast, and sent part of his crew to capture the packet-ship, he had little thought that that very act would be instrumental in the capture of his vessel and the rescue of himself a few weeks after.

His escape was welcomed by his comrades with delight, for they had given him up as lost, knowing that he and his schooner, with a few of his messmates, had fallen into the clutches of the captain of the Sea Wolf.

It was a source of joy to the chief, to find on board of the packet the very youth who had been instrumental in his capture, and the taking of his vessel, and whom he had been most anxious to get into his power.

"I'll force the secret from him, and that black slave, by torture of the cruelest kind, as to where this island is where they have hidden the treasure that was Montezuma's."

"The boy, I know, is Montezuma's son, for he bears the name of Merle Monte, and I remember well the night he was born, when the Persian Prince Kaluta pursued the yacht and tried to capture her.

"Amid storm and battle the boy was born

and his mother dying, and his father being killed, the yacht and treasure should have been mine, but for those slaves that kept me from it.

"Curses on them! they thwarted me then, and set me adrift in an open boat off Vera Cruz; but they did not go far with the yacht, for there were but three of them, and the craft doubtless went ashore in the storm that followed, on some part of the coast, or an island, though I have been unable to find where.

"I have been the football of Fate long enough, and once I can find Montezuma's treasure island, I will furl the black flag and live like a prince and a Christian.

"The boy and his slave both had plenty of money, and jewels, and I therefore know that the treasure was not lost, if the yacht was, and I'll wring the secret by torture from them, or they shall die.

"If I get it the crew can have this craft, and I'll sink Brandt, the Buccaneer, and become once more Brandt Brentford, for the little wild oat-sowing of my past will be forgotten when I am a millionaire.

"But what a shock it was to see in that pretended cabin-boy one whom I believed dead! Bah! I was mistaken in it, that was all; but there is no doubt now, for my aim is too sure, and the apparition will never rise before me again.

"Now I must drill my crew to be ready at any moment I may see proper to seize this craft, and upon no account to kill, or even wound, that boy and his slave, for their tongues silenced and the treasure is forever lost."

Thus soliloquized Brandt, the Buccaneer, as he stood in his priestly garb, leaning over the taffrail of the packet-ship, the night after leaving Baltimore, and gazing at the phosphorescent wake, as though charmed by its beauty, and yet so deeply wrapt in his own thoughts as not to see the glimmering waters.

The days went by, and at last the trap was sprung, the vessel was seized, and a lucky accident of the tide bearing the vessel close in to one of the rocky islands near by, was the means of saving the midshipman and his slave, through their escaping by the yard-arm, as it swung almost against a point of rocks.

Believing his intended victims dead, killed by the fire of his men, Brandt, the Buccaneer, felt the necessity of looking after the safety of his vessel, which bore away from the ragged rocks just in time to prevent serious damage.

As no place of landing was visible, the weather looked threatening, and he felt assured that both Merle and Mezrak were dead,

with bitter curses at having lost the treasure he had hoped to find through them, he held on his way, capturing vessel after vessel, until at last the revenue cutter fell into his power, and he was once again afloat upon an armed deck, even though he had not more than a score of men under his command.

But his paucity in numbers did not trouble the chief, for he knew where he could easily ship a hundred desperate men, and toward that point he headed the trim little cruiser that had fallen into his hands.

CHAPTER VII.

BAD BLOOD AMONG THE MIDDIES.

WHEN Merle Monte reported on board the United States cruiser *Sea Wolf*, he was warmly welcomed by Captain Mayo Meredith and Lieutenant Basil Branscombe, the senior officer next to the captain.

But he had not such a warm welcome from a junior lieutenant, Dunning Graham by name, and his brother midshipmen, two of whom were very pronounced in their dislike of him, envy being at the bottom of it.

These two were Midshipmen Otis Raleigh and Hugh Benton, and they were nagged on in their dislike of Merle, by their superior, Lieutenant Graham, who was wont to continually throw out such remarks as:

"He'll ascend the ladder of promotion, young gentlemen, right over your heads."

"The captain thinks more of him now, than he does of us all."

These remarks added to the flame of envy, which had been planted through Merle's capture of the buccaneer and his vessel, and then his escape from the packet-ship, and fight with the wreckers.

For an unknown boy to thus accomplish so much, and win rank which their family influence and several years of hard knocks and service had gained for them, made the midshipmen on board the *Sea Wolf* jealous of the daring youth.

All could see at a glance that he knew his duties well, and he was far ahead of his older messmates in learning, while he was certainly their superior in strength, marksmanship and other qualities that all admired to make up the brave, self-reliant man.

Upon the arrival of the *Sea Wolf* at New Orleans, to repair thoroughly and re-provision, before going in chase of the escaped pirate, Captain Meredith gave the middies a day and night off, and Merle at once saw that he was to be slighted, for his messmates clubbed together, and they looked at him in an impertinent way, and talked in whispers about him.

He was conscious of having given them no cause for this conduct, and felt hurt at their manner; but his pride held him aloof, and

he went ashore with his faithful shadow, Mezrak.

Mezrak had also observed the conduct of the youngsters, and also that of Lieutenant Dunning Graham, and his mind at once grasped the cause, for he said:

"They are jealous of you, master, because you have done a man's work, though a boy only in years."

"If that is it, my good Mezrak, they shall have greater cause for envy, if the occasion offers, for I love the service, and will rise to high rank in it," answered Merle.

Going up-town to a fashionable restaurant, Merle ordered a good dinner, and Mezrak stood behind his chair, faithfully waiting upon him, for even when ashore together on the island, where the yacht had been wrecked, and in nursing the boy through his babyhood and later years, the devoted slave had never forgotten that Merle was the son of Montezuma, faithfully intrusted to his care by his dying father, and therefore his master under any and all circumstances.

Presently, into the restaurant came Otis Raleigh, Hugh Benton, and the other five midshipmen of the Sea Wolf, and they took seats at a large table near Merle, not even noticing him by a nod in recognition of his bow.

Aboard ship, duty compelled them to associate with him, but ashore they would have their own way, and, from talking the matter over, and brooding over it, they had almost begun to look upon the youth as having been guilty of some crime, whereas his gallant deeds, and winning public favor and the friendship of the captain and first luff had gained him their ill-will.

"I wonder where he gets money to order such a sumptuous repast, with wine and all the entrees?" said Hugh Benton, in a tone loud enough for Merle to hear.

"It's a mystery no one on board ship, not even the Sea Wolf's gossip, can fathom, for when picked up by the captain he was only a poor ranchero's son, I have heard," responded Otis Raleigh.

"I guess he filled his pockets with some of the jewels the pirate chief had in his cabin," said another.

"That's it, Doty, for he does wear a ruby of immense value on his little finger."

"He has proven himself such a good sailor, who knows but that he may have been a young pirate himself?" said Hugh Benton.

At this all laughed; but the laugh was suddenly checked as Merle arose quickly from his seat, and seizing his glass of wine dashed it full in the face of his insulter, while he said sternly:

"From this day, gentlemen, I declare war against you all."

Hugh Benton sprung to his feet with a cry of rage, and turned savagely upon Merle, a knife in his hand, which he had hastily seized from the table.

But, to his surprise and mortification the knife was suddenly wrenched from his hand, and a blow full in the face sent him backward upon the table, while Merle said:

"This is no place for a row, sir; but if you have cause of trouble with me, you know well where I can be found."

The few persons in the restaurant, with the proprietor and his waiters, had now assembled, and were talking excitedly, seemingly not daring to interfere, and seeing this Otis Raleigh cried:

"Come, lads, let us stop his promotion right here."

All seemed in humor to follow the advice, for they had been making merry with wine all day, when suddenly the form of Mezrak glided up to the side of his young master.

There was not one of the middies but knew the giant strength of the slave, and his courage, and they dared not to face Merle and the black together, though they were seven to two, and Hugh Benton who had already had a sample of his foe's blows, cried out:

"Hold on, lads, this is not the place, as that fellow says, for a row."

Seeing their leader back down, the rest were only too willing, and the tipsy party walked out of the restaurant, while Merle resumed his seat and coolly finished his dinner.

CHAPTER VIII.

CHALLENGED.

UPON returning on board ship, Merle was not surprised at finding seven notes awaiting him.

They were from his midshipmen messmates, couched in most insulting language, and commanding him not to speak to one of them again, except under orders, and in discharge of his duties, under penalty of severe punishment.

One of the notes was a little different, and that one I give below *verbatim*:

"ON BOARD SEA WOLF. }
11 o'clock, P. M. }

"To MIDSHIPMAN MERLE MONTE:—

"SIR:—You of course have sense enough to comprehend that I cannot pass over your blow to-day, without demanding satisfaction for it, such as one gentleman has a right to ask of another for an insult given.

"Hence, I shall expect of you a written apology, as well as a public one, upon the deck of this vessel, or you shall meet me with what weapons you please, and at what time you may see fit, to wipe out the insult.

"Accident gave you a name, and won for you promotion, and by your sly ways, you have insinuated yourself into the good favor of several of our

superior officers, until our mess looks upon you as a 'Jonah' on board our vessel, and I believe that I will be the one to rid the service of one who has no parentage or country to look back upon, for, I have heard that Mezrak, your shadow, is all the link that connects you with the past.

"Expecting an immediate reponse, and warning you that I will not allow you to address me, except upon duty, and by way of an humble apology, I am,

"With no respect,

"HUGH BENTON."

Merle read his seven letters over with a smile, and then handed them to Mezrak, while he went on duty.

Early the following morning Mezrak returned them with the remark:

"Better meet him, master; choose swords, and the city dueling-ground,* and at sunset to-morrow; and, as all of them insult you, it will be better to challenge the others and have the quarrel over with."

"So I think, Mezrak; but I have no second."

"I will attend to that, master, for your father had friends in this city, and if you go to the field alone I will soon follow with a second for you."

"Very well, Mezrak, I will answer the notes and you can deliver them," and half an hour after the seven middies were each in receipt of a note from Merle, that of Hugh Benton reading:

"ON BOARD SEA WOLF. }
Thursday morning. }

"HUGH BENTON, *Midshipman U. S. Navy*:-

"SIR:-No apology will be offered, and, suspecting you as being possessed of good sense, I am surprised that you suggested it.

"Time-this afternoon at sunset.

"Place-the City Dueling field.

"Weapons-swords.

"Respectfully,

"MERLE MONTE."

The other six letters read alike and were as follows:

"ON BOARD SEA WOLF. }
Thursday morning. }

"To, etc.:

"In response to your insulting communication, I can only say that, as you are anxious to get rid of me, I will gladly furnish you the opportunity.

"Time-one hour before sunset to-day.

"Place-the City Dueling-field.

"Weapons-whatsoever you please.

"Respectfully,

"MERLE MONTE."

To say that the seven middies were surprised, would be to draw it mildly.

They were astounded, and several who had not felt bitter toward Merle, and yet had been urged on by Benton and Raleigh, wished to withdraw their letters by frankly writing others of apology.

But this they dared not do, when they spoke of it.

All had believed that Merle would weaken if opposed to the entire mess, and once they

* The dueling-ground of New Orleans, near the city.

gained the whip-hand of him, they would see that he did not get any more promotions through gallantry.

But, when he not only refused to apologize to Hugh Benton, but to challenge the six others to meet him in the *duello*, setting the same place, and time, almost for the seven duels, they were astounded, and wished they had been less precipitate in their actions.

But they had begun the fight and they must go on to the end.

Two hours before the appointed time Merle left the ship, and shortly after Mezrak followed, bearing a bundle under his arm.

The seven middies had long before begged leave for half a day or night, and were at a fencing gallery in the city practicing, for they knew well that Merle handled both sword and pistol skillfully.

At last two carriages took the party, a little elated with wine, out to the field, and to their surprise they found Merle seated there beneath a tree, engaged reading a book.

He was alone, but on their approach arose and raised his cap.

"Where are your seconds, sir?" demanded Otis Raleigh, insolently, for he was to act as second for Hugh Benton.

"I had no friend I could call on, sir, but Mezrak knew a friend of my father who he thought would act for me, and went after him. It is yet ten minutes to the time," and Merle glanced carelessly at a handsome watch he had purchased that day.

One would have thought his confession of his friendless condition in the world would have moved the hearts of his messmates to pity rather than bitterness and hate, and it did in one or two cases; but the ringleaders were determined to press the rising boy against the wall, and they showed no compassion, and those who felt any dared not give exhibition of the praiseworthy quality.

Having given his explanation, Merle resumed his seat and his book, to the utmost surprise of the others, who, one and all of them, were certainly nervous, in spite of the courage the wine had imbued them with.

They tried to think that he was "making believe," and not reading; but noting his face they saw that it was unmoved, and regularly each page was turned, until they were convinced there was no pretense, and that the boy was cool as an icicle outwardly, whatever might be his inward emotion.

An impatient ejaculation from Hugh Benton, who, with his companions had been walking nervously about, caused Merle to glance up, and then again at his watch.

Seeing that the time was up, he rose quickly, and seeing no one approaching, said calmly:

"Gentlemen, I shall have to trust in your honor and meet you without a second."

"This you know our honor will not permit, and your being here alone looks very much like an evasion of a meeting with us," said Otis Raleigh.

But as he ceased speaking there was heard the rumble of wheels, and the next instant up dashed a closed carriage with Mezrak seated upon the box with the driver.

CHAPTER IX.

CATCHING A TARTAR.

THE entire party of middies, including Merle, gazed somewhat curiously upon the carriage as it drew up, and Mezrak sprung to the ground, for they were desirous of seeing who it was that the Abyssinian had gotten for a second for his master.

The door was opened, and eight pairs of lips uttered an expression of surprise, alarm and anger commingled.

And no wonder, for those who descended from the vehicle, and there were two of them, were none other than Captain Mayo Meredith and his surgeon, Doctor Dan Delafield.

The faces of the captain and surgeon were in strong contrast to those of the middies, for the former were smiling, and the latter pale and perplexed, even to Merle's.

As for Mezrak, his countenance was always unreadable, except when he was in a rage.

Now, it was as passive as a mill-pond.

The surgeon took his box of surgical instruments from out the vehicle and Mezrak unrolled the bundle, which he had brought with him from the ship, and which were a pair of superb swords and a box of dueling pistols.

"A pleasant evening, young gentlemen, for deadly sport," said the captain, as he approached the group.

The middies all saluted, but did not reply, and Captain Meredith continued:

"I see I am not an invited, or an expected guest, but nevertheless I have come and Midshipman Monte, the reason of my coming is to act as *your second*, in this very equal meeting you are to have against seven older men than yourself, and whose conduct toward you has not escaped my eye."

"Believe me, gentlemen, this is no act of mine," and Merle turned with an almost frightened look to his foes, for he could see that their belief was that he had informed Captain Meredith of the meeting.

"I will vouch for that, gentlemen, and my word goes as something here, I know. Mezrak had sought to gain a friend of Mr. Monte's father, to act for him; but the gentleman being absent from the city, he returned hastily on board ship, told me of the

affair at the restaurant, and of which I had word already, and then showed me the letters Midshipman Monte had received from his messmates. I at once determined to befriend the gallant young officer, and knowing his nature, and expecting sharp work, I brought Surgeon Delafield, so now let us get to work. You, I believe, Benton, are to first meet Midshipman Monte, and the weapons are swords?"

This was certainly carrying the war across the line for the middies, to suddenly have their captain, from whom they had expected instant arrest, with court-martial to follow, not only urge the affair on, but act for their foe.

"Perhaps, Captain Meredith, we had better drop the matter here, and give pledge that there will be no more trouble," said Hugh Benton; feeling that he was speaking for his comrades.

"Pardon me, Captain Meredith, but I refuse to drop the matter here," said Merle, quickly.

The captain and surgeon smiled, and the middies feeling confident that there would be no blood shed, with their superior officers present, all bowed acquiescence that the affair should go on.

"By all means, Monte, for never come to a field unless you mean fight," said Captain Meredith.

So saying he took up one of the swords handed him by Mezrak, and seeing its temper said:

"These are superb blades, Benton, so you had better take one of these, for Monte will give you your choice, I know."

"With pleasure, sir," and Merle smiled, as he bade Mezrak give Mr. Benton his choice.

Throwing aside their jackets, a moment after the two middies faced each other.

Benton was eighteen years of age, being over two years the senior of Merle, and his form was larger and heavier; but it lacked the leonine grace, and quickness of movement of Merle, and his manner was a trifle nervous, though no one could doubt his courage.

At a word from Captain Meredith the blades crossed, and though all knew Merle understood the use of a weapon, they were surprised at the masterly manner in which he handled it, for his movements were like lightning, his strength something wonderful for one of his years, and his endurance seemed untiring.

Step by step he drove Benton backward, really playing with him, and keeping him busy defending himself only, and suddenly striking up his blade, he ran his own through the sword-arm of his foe.

Instantly withdrawing it, he turned on his heel, and said coolly:

"I hope Midshipman Benton will be satisfied with the souvenir I leave him of me."

The surgeon sprung to the side of Benton, who turned deadly pale, and quickly dressed the wound, while Captain Meredith said:

"It is your turn now, Raleigh, as soon as Monte has had a resting-spell."

"I need no rest, sir, and am ready now."

"What are Midshipman Raleigh's weapons?" asked Merle calmly.

"Swords only shall be used, for I am confident no deadly work will follow, as I see, Monte, you are a master of this weapon, and will not punish too heavily, when it lies in your power to do so."

Merle bowed, and then took his place in front of Otis Raleigh, who was certainly quite nervous, as he had seen Hugh Benton so cleverly handled, and knew that Merle could have killed him had he so desired.

As though warming up to his work, Merle pressed Raleigh from the start at a killing pace, and with the same result, a thrust through the sword-arm of his foe.

The wounded midshipman was then turned over to Surgeon Delafield, and Merle was confronted with his third adversary, whose sword was sent flying from his grasp at the first pass, while the end of his blade just slit the right ear, as a punishment, for recently Ned Hastings had been his bitterest enemy, without having the courage to openly speak out.

"A dangerous slip that, Monte," said Captain Meredith, who had feared that Merle meant to kill his foe.

"I intended to mark him, sir," was the calm reply.

The remaining four middies were now decidedly nervous, and would willingly have avoided a meeting with one whom they felt to be so greatly their superior.

But Captain Meredith was firm, and called the next to the scratch.

It was one of the middies who had felt sorry for Merle, and yet whose strength of character had not been sufficient to enable him to take a firm stand.

This Merle seemed to realize, for, with a single movement of his wrist, he sent the sword flying from his hand, and lowering his own weapon, he said quietly:

"I leave you unmarked, sir."

Frankly did the youth, Bennett Ross, step forward and extend his hand, while he said in earnest tones:

"Forgive me, Monte, for weakness in the past, and let us be friends."

"Willingly," said Merle, grasping his hand warmly, while Captain Meredith and the surgeon, in a breath, said:

"Well done for you, Ross."

"And I frankly confess my error, Monte, and beg your pardon before you get a chance to mark me, for I freely admit we caught a Tartar."

And Lawrence Langley also extended his hand, which Merle took with the same sincerity with which it had been offered.

"Number six! your turn now, Martin," sung out Captain Meredith, addressing a midshipman with a sinister face, and who had been particularly marked in his disagreeable manner toward Merle.

"Ay, ay, sir," said Martin, and he toed the scratch gamely.

He was known to be the best swordsman on board the Sea Wolf, and wore a confident smile.

But hardly had his weapon crossed that of his young foe, when he found his sword struck up, and then came a stinging pain across the cheek, which Merle had opened with a skill and nerve that showed him to be possessed of marvelous power in the handling of a blade.

"That is an ugly wound, Monte," said Captain Meredith, somewhat sternly.

"Paul Martin is an ugly customer, sir, and the wound will leave a scar that will keep me constantly in his memory," was the quick reply.

"Number seven! your turn now, Menken," cried Captain Meredith, seemingly anxious to have the affair over.

"Midshipman Monte has had no time to rest, captain, and Menken is a dangerous hand with the blade," called out Surgeon Delafield, stopping in the operation of stitching up the gaping wound in the cheek of Paul Martin, whose eyes blazed upon his foe with fury.

"True; I beg pardon, Monte," said the captain.

"I need no rest, sir, for I have had little to tire me, and if Mr. Menken is ready I am," was Merle's indifferent response.

The blades crossed, and it was evidently the intention of Heber Menken to kill, if he could.

Merle saw this, and he pressed him hard from the commencement, worried him into nervousness, played with him fairly, allowed him no time to rest, and suddenly disarming him stepped quickly forward, and with his open hand slapped the face of his foe with a force that must have made him "see stars."

"Now, gentlemen, I hope you are all satisfied."

"Captain Meredith, I owe you my warmest thanks for your kindness, and you also, Surgeon Delafield, for I fear I have given you considerable trouble," and Merle tossed his sword to Mezrak to clean and mop up.

"It is better that I do the work than the undertaker, Monte," said the surgeon significantly, adding the last stitch to the wound in Martin's face.

"Now, young gentlemen, you will please report on board ship as soon as possible, and if I find any more of this despicable feeling shown against Midshipman Monte, I will allow his punishment of you to be more severe than it has, and I do not believe one of you will deny but that he had it in his power to kill you in detail," said Captain Meredith, addressing the discomfited middies, after which he turned to Merle and added:

"Midshipman Monte, it will give me pleasure to have you and the doctor dine with me to-day."

Merle bowed in acceptance, and leaving Mezrak to ride the horse he had ridden there back to town, he got into the captain's vehicle, followed by his commander and the surgeon, and the three chatted over the duels as they were driven into the city.

CHAPTER X.

THE MYSTERIOUS SEAMAN.

SOME ten days after the arrival of the Sea Wolf in the port of the Crescent City, a lugger came slowly up the river and dropped anchor not two fathoms astern of the cruiser.

The craft was not ill-shapen to a critical eye, and carried considerable canvas; but there was an air of neglect about her that showed her to belong to some of the plantations on the coast, and to be manned by a negro crew.

In fact, half a dozen negroes and one white man seemed to comprise the crew.

The negroes were as like in appearance as peas, but the white man was peculiar in his appearance.

He was a stout man, dressed in a slovenly sailor suit, and had hair and whiskers of almost crimson hue, so fiery red were they; while his eyes were black and piercing.

He eyed the cruiser with apparently the deepest interest, whole hours at a time, until the middies began to joke with him and ask him if he did not want to ship in one of Uncle Sam's sea warriors.

One day as he sat watching the vessel, seemingly enraptured with her beauty and awed by the armament, he saw a boat drawn alongside and two middies descend into it as for a trip ashore.

Instantly he called to one of his black crew, and springing into the lugger's yawl, was rowed to the shore.

The two middies, one of them with a bandage around his face, walked leisurely

up into the town, and the red-headed seaman followed them, though apparently not intending to do so.

After they turned a corner and were lost to sight from any one who might be looking on the deck of the cruiser, the man overtook them.

"Ahoy! young gents, I hope you hain't above taking a glass of grog with a man whose craft has no quarter-deck," he said in a bluff but friendly way.

"Hello, Red Head, it's you, is it?" said Paul Martin, recognizing him as the mysterious man on the lugger.

"Yes, my fine young gentleman, it's me, Red Head, if so you please to call me, though my name is Peter Stokes."

"Indeed! Mr. Stokes, I am glad to meet you. Here, Menken, let me present you to my read-headed friend, Captain Peter Stokes of the African lugger that lies astern of the Sea Wolf. What did you say, my dear captain, about grog?" and the lively young middy smiled innocently.

"I said, lads, that if you didn't mind a glass of grog with an humble salt-water follower, I'd be happy to have you join me. I know a place where the liquor is good, and I guess it would help that aching tooth of yours, sir."

"*Aching tooth* be cursed, man! that is a wound received in battle, an honorable scar, or so I shall report it, when I return home," answered Paul Martin, his face flushing with anger at the remembrance of how he had received the wound.

"Well, we will go and drink that you some day get even with the man that marked you for life."

"Done, my gallant lugger skipper! I'll drink that toast until I can't run on an even keel. Come, here is a grog-shop, and it hangs out good colors."

Paul Martin led the way into a saloon upon St. Charles street, and which was a fashionable resort at that time.

The three men were given a table a little apart from the others, as the middies had asked to be near a window, and a bottle of wine was called for, the contents of which soon set the tongues of the two lads and the older sailor to wagging pretty freely.

It was but a very short while before Paul Martin and Heber Menken found that the sailor was not a man to be made fun of.

He was hot-headed as a woodpecker, unkempt in his toilet, and slovenly in his attire; but he was no fool, and had evidently, from his talk, seen far more salt water than they both had together.

"So your ship is the craft set for the work of running down the Buccaneer Brandt?" said Peter Stokes, after awhile.

"Yes, skipper, and she is the craft for the work," answered Paul Martin.

"They say the revenue cutter he captured is fast."

"True, and so is the Sea Wolf, while we have over a hundred men in crew, and fifteen guns, and Brandt cannot raise half a hundred, and the cutter carries but nine guns. "Oh! we'll have him before long."

"You know his haunts, I suppose?"

"Some of them."

"Well, there is one on board who ought to know all of them."

"Send him aboard the Wolf to have a talk with the captain."

"I mean he is on board your vessel, not mine."

"Ah! who is that?"

"A midshipman, I believe he is, for he got that rank for capturing the chief before."

"Ha! Merle Monte!" cried both of the middies in a breath.

"Yes, that is the name, and what he don't know about pirates and their haunts ain't worth knowing."

"Why, how did he glean all this piratical knowledge?" asked Midshipman Menken.

"The best way in the world."

"How was that?"

"By being one of 'em."

The middies looked at each other in surprise.

"Being one of them?" asked Paul Martin, eagerly.

"Yes."

"I do not understand you."

"Why, he was a pirate himself."

"Merle Monte a pirate?"

"Certainly, didn't you know it?"

"Never! no, no indeed! you surprise us."

"I thought you knew it, and that he got a pardon from the President on account of capturing Brandt, and then set to work to hunt down his former comrades."

"I say I thought you knew all this."

The middies were astounded, and after gazing at each other significantly, and then at their mysterious companion, Paul Martin said:

"No one on our vessel ever suspected this, I assure you."

"Then I have done wrong in telling, but I thought you knew it."

"No; we only knew that Monte was said to be the son of a ranchero on the Mexican shore, near Corpus Christi.*"

"No; his father is really Brandt, the Buccaneer," was the low, earnest words that came from the lips of the mysterious seaman, and both Paul Martin and Heber Menken sat like statues, struck dumb with amazement.

* At that time a Mexican town.

CHAPTER XI.

THE SKIPPER'S YARN.

IF the skipper of the lugger saw the sinister look of triumph upon the face of Paul Martin and Heber Menken, at his startling words, he did not appear to notice them, but went on quietly:

"Oh, yes; he's the son of the buccaneer, as I thought at his messmates knew, or I'd not been the one to give him away."

"You see, Brandt talked sweet to the boy's mother, and she fell in love with him, for she did not know he was a pirate."

"The lady was the daughter of a rich ranchero near Corpus Christi, and she married Brandt, or, leastways, she thought she did, for the ceremony was performed; but Brandt already had a wife, and the priest whom he took to the vessel to marry them, was no priest at all, only his lieutenant dressed up in robes, so you see he deceived the poor young girl."

"As soon as she found out who Brandt really was, she hated him, and tried every way she could to escape from him, but was never able to do so."

"At length they had a little baby born, and he is the boy of whom I am talking."

"Well, he was brought up a young pirate, and they do say that when he was but twelve years of age he was the best one in the band with sword and pistol."

"His mother lived on one of Brandt's islands, and the boy was constantly at sea with his father, so that he became a good sailor when he was little more than a child."

"His father never allowed him to see his mother, they said, unless he was present with him, so he never knew how she, and himself, too, had been wronged."

But one day Brandt was badly wounded and carried to the island, and then it was that the boy saw his mother alone, and heard from her lips the story of her wrongs and her shame.

"He took it fearfully to heart, they say, and swore he would kill his father then and there; but his mother begged him not to do so, but to aid her to leave the island, and to go with her."

"This the boy promised to do, and he let into the secret a slave, that had been captured from a Spanish vessel, and whose life he had saved, which bound the black to him for life."

"Those two rigged out a large ship's yawl, decked her over, to make it comfortable and seaworthy, and one night, just at dark, when the wind was blowing fair, left the island secretly, leaving Brandt, lying on his back, still suffering from his wound."

"The boy, as I have said, was a good sailor, and, instead of heading for the Mexi

can shore, at the nearest point, stood boldly out into the Gulf, and thus threw the pursuers that followed him at dawn off his track.

"In good time he navigated his little craft into port, Corpus Christi, I think, and the boy and his mother went upon a ranch in the interior to live.

"But there Brandt followed them, and attacking the hacienda one night, he shot down the poor woman, but his son, heading the cowboys on the ranch, drove him and his crew back to their boats.

"From that night Merle Monte swore to hunt down his father and bring him to the gallows, and he very nearly succeeded, I have heard, and, as he is now an officer in the navy, and upon such a swift craft as the Sea Wolf is reputed, I guess he will yet keep his oath.

"But come, gents, let us have another bottle of wine, and then I must go and see if my stores are ready to carry back to the plantation."

The bottle of wine was eagerly drank, and then, greatly excited by the yarn of the skipper, they bade him farewell and hastily returned to the Sea Wolf, to spread through the ship the joyful, to them, tidings they had heard against Merle Monte, and which they implicitly believed in every particular.

CHAPTER XII.

THE SKIPPER MEETS HIS MATCH.

HAD either Heber Menken or Paul Martin seen the look upon the face of their skipper friend, as they walked away, they would have observed something there which they could not fathom, and yet of which they could read sufficient to show them that he had been playing their credulity into his own hands.

He smiled in a way they would not have liked, as they departed, leaving him at the table, for he returned to it as soon as they bade him adieu.

"Those hot-brained fools will do the work well, I'm thinking. They do not like the boy, I am certain, and I guess that one with the wounded face, if he told the truth, would say that the youngster gave it to him, for Belo says there was a duel among the mid-dies some days ago, and one of them got the better of all the others. Well, I'll bide my time to see what harvest the sowing of my yarn in those young fools' ears will bring, and if it does not set him adrift, then I'll see what else is to be done. Another bottle of wine here, waiter."

The waiter brought the wine quickly and drew the cork.

"Why not order another glass, my friend, for I am thirsty?" said a frank voice behind

the skipper, and turning quickly he saw a man who appeared to be a well-to-do merchant.

He was stout, red-faced and dressed in black, while a pair of gold spectacles concealed his eyes.

The skipper at first seemed inclined to resent the familiarity, and frowned; but thinking better of it, he said quietly:

"Another glass here, waiter."

Then turning to the stranger, he continued:

"You are certainly welcome, sir, for I am no man to refuse a glass of grog to any shipmate, or land-lubber either, if it comes to that."

The stranger quietly poured out a glass of the really delicious wine, and quaffed it with:

"Good will and good health, sir, on land or sea."

Refilling the glass, as he smacked his lips with gusto, he continued:

"Did you apply the name of grog to this nectar, sir?"

"That is what I called it," curtly replied the skipper.

"Then your looks do not belie you, for I wondered how one of your rig could order such nectar, and the truth is you knew not the virtues of the wine. Grog forsooth! why, sir, this is as sweet as the tears of angels weeping with joy," and he filled and dashed off another glass.

"Yes, sir, this is made from the juice of grapes grown in the vineyards of Paradise," and down his capacious throat went another glass.

"Talk of nectar, sir, why this is the honey of nectar," and another glass was disposed of with a smack of the lips.

"The perfume of this wine, sir, is stolen from the flowers of Eden," and another glass followed the others, while the wine-bibber continued, as the skipper gazed in amazement upon him:

"The color of this wine, sir, which you vulgarly call grog, seems to be made of the tints caught from the rainbow, and—"

"What do you think of the bottle, shipmate, for that is all that is left?" broke in the skipper.

"The bottle, sir, is empty; and it, like the human form, is but the clayey casket that held the spirit, you see."

"No, I don't see a drop of that wine left."

"Ah! then it is my turn to play the host. Here, waiter, a glass of common grog for my seedy-looking friend here, and a bottle of that same nectar of the gods for me."

"Curse you! do you intend to insult me?" and the skipper was upon his feet in an instant.

"Sit down! Brandt, the Buccaneer."

The words came sternly from the lips of the stranger, and without a word the man sunk down in his chair, while he cast a furtive glance around to see if any one had heard that name fall from the lips of the strange person before him.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE PIRATES' PLOT.

THE return of the waiter with a glass of rum, and a bottle of wine, prevented the skipper from uttering a word, after his glance around the room.

"There, *garcon*, the grog for that person, the wine for me," said the stranger quietly, and as the waiter retired out of hearing the skipper broke out with:

"In the Devil's own name, who are you?"

"One who knows you well, Captain Brandt," was the quiet reply.

"Why do you call me Brandt?"

"Because that is your name."

"You are mistaken, sir."

"Then Brandt, the Buccaneer, if so you like it better."

"You surely do not mean to say you recognize in me that famous pirate?"

"As surely as I say that in your pretended negro crew, on board the lugger at anchor in the river, I recognize half-a-dozen of your picked men."

"Well, admit that I be he whom you say, how did you recognize me?" asked Brandt.

"Your voice first attracted my attention, and then one glance into those splendid eyes of yours and I knew you, for neither your tone or eyes belong to such a slovenly disguise."

"Again I ask you who you are?"

"A friend."

"Your name?"

"See if you cannot guess?"

Brandt eyed the man closely and said:

"No, I never remember to have seen you before."

"Then *my* disguise is complete."

"Who are you?"

"Your old lieutenant, Max Maurice."

"Ha! but no; for he was as slender as—"

"As you are, you were going to say, only you are not slender with those half-dozen suits of clothes on, and it is the same with me, for I am padded from hip to shoulder, and look like a gouty city merchant, if I don't feel it."

"The truth is I am too well known to many here to go without a thorough disguise."

"Well, Max, no one would ever know you in that rig; but what are you doing here when I believed you in the Moro Castle at Havana?"

"Ah, it's a story soon told. I am here to get a crew and a deck under me."

"But how did you get out of the Moro?"

"A pretty girl fell in love with my good looks, and she managed to unlock doors and remove iron bars for my exit, and here I am."

"And you were in search of a vessel and crew?"

"Yes, for I heard of your capture, and that of the schooner, and did not expect you to turn up again, once the United States had its grip upon you."

"But I have, you see?"

"Oh, yes, and I am glad of it, and rejoice to hear of your bold capture of the packet-ship from Baltimore."

"Well, what have you done in the way of a crew?"

"I have a good one."

"And a vessel?"

"None yet."

"Well, I have the vessel, so come with me with your crew."

"I'll do it, though it was not exactly right for you to desert me, the night of our attack on Don Pablo's hacienda."

"The troops drove us to our boats, and I could not warn you and the men in the cellar."

"Well, I'll forget it, as I escaped; but if they had garroted me, I'd have haunted you through life, Captain Brandt; but where is your craft?"

"In one of the bayous on the coast, for I dared not come here in her, so captured a plantation lugger and ran up for stores, and to see if I could not find out where the Sea Wolf was."

"You found her here?"

"Yes, and will know just where she is going to search for me; but better still, I have found out that the one who captured me is on board of her as a middy."

"A boy, I believe it was?"

"Yes, and he is a son of Montezuma the Merciless, of whom you have heard me speak."

"Ah, yes, whose treasure was lost on some part of the coast."

"It was not lost, and if I can get that boy in my possession, I will find out where it is, and accomplish my revenge too."

"I'll get him in your power, if you give me a liberal share."

"I'll do it."

"Done! Now let us go and I'll turn the crew over to you, and then I'll set to work to get the boy."

"But how?"

"I'll ship on the Sea Wolf!" was the low response of Max Maurice, the pirate lieutenant.

CHAPTER XIV.

LOST IN A LAGOON.

A SMALL vessel, fore-and-aft-rig, was drifting listlessly upon the waters of the Gulf, not a third of a league from the shore, off Barrataria Bay.

She had been driven before a hurricane past the Delta of the Mississippi, and then, beating her way back to enter the river by the way of the Southwest Pass, had been becalmed.

It was evidently a trading craft, and upon her decks were visible a few passengers, one of whom was a little old man with gray hair and beard.

He had been watching the shore for some time, doubtless thinking of the days when Lafitte, the Pirate of the Gulf, had spread his black flag to the breeze in those waters, and ruled like a king on shore.

As though interested deeply, he suddenly turned to the skipper and asked:

"Captain, there is no hopes of a breeze for a couple of hours, is there?"

"I fear not, sir, until dark."

"Then if you will lend me your small boat, I would like to row ashore and look around."

The old man had paid liberally for his passage, and the captain had taken a fancy to him, so answered:

"The boat is at your service, Mr. Belden, but don't get out of sight of us."

A few moments after, the elderly passenger was rowing shoreward with a stroke that showed he knew well how to handle the oars.

He did not follow the captain's advice, for he did get out of sight of the schooner, and penetrated a lagoon, whose dark, deep waters ran far inland.

Gazing upon the somber funereal vails* upon the trees along the banks, Mr. Belden continued on his way for more than a mile inland, until he entered a small lake, and then he started upon his return, thinking he had gone far enough.

Half a dozen lagoons suddenly opened before him just then, and the banks of all of them being alike, he was unable to tell by which he had come.

Taking the one he thought he remembered as the one by which he had entered the lake, he pulled along for some time until he felt he was wrong.

But just here he was in a perfect net-work of lagoons, or bayous, and after a thorough search for the one he thought led to the Gulf, he was forced to admit that he was lost.

* The long, drooping moss that covers the trees in that latitude.

That no one was near to aid him to find his way back, he was assured, and he at once determined to retrace his course to the lake, and there try each lagoon in succession until he found the right one.

But this was no easy matter, for before his prow the network opened, and he soon became bewildered as to which direction the lake lay in, for the forest of trees, heavily covered with moss, shut out the sight of the sun from his view.

As he was about to give up rowing and let his boat drift where it would, he suddenly beheld, not a cable's length away, a vessel.

It was lying close inshore, was half-hidden by the overhanging trees and moss, and had his eyes not been very keen, in spite of his seeming age, he might have passed without seeing her.

He was at first delighted with his discovery, and had seized his oars again to row toward her, when he remembered that, if Lafitte was dead, a few pirate craft yet plowed the seas, and that was a very suspicious neighborhood to be in, and a vessel so hidden must be a suspicious craft.

Landing, he took a closer view of the craft from the opposite shore.

She was armed—that was certain.

Men in uniform were on her deck too, and he was surprised that he had not been seen. What could she be doing there?

Was she an honest vessel?

These questions he asked himself, yet could not answer.

As he stood, looking closely at the vessel, his eyes suddenly fell upon a boat, far down the lagoon, pulling toward the schooner.

He noted the position of the boat, which was over a mile distant, and saw that it had just rounded a point of land upon which grew five tall, white-trunked sycamores.

There were three men in the boat he saw, as it came nearer, and it was evidently making for the schooner.

Crouching down in the thicket he waited its approach, and, as it drew nearer, heard a voice on the schooner cry out:

"The boat is coming back!"

As the boat drew near, the same voice that had spoken from the vessel's deck called out:

"Ho, Pedro! What news?"

"None, for the Indian has not returned from the city, so we must expect to stay in this black hole several days longer," said a man in the stern of the boat.

"Ah! Captain Brandt don't care for our comfort, while he's enjoying the pleasures of the city," was the response of the one on the deck, and the next moment the boat ran alongside the schooner.

"Captain Brandt!"

The name fairly burst from the lips of the old man, and he stood like one struck dumb.

For some moments he remained motionless, excepting that he repeated over and over again the name he had heard spoken.

Then he cautiously glided away from his place of concealment, regained his boat, and, creeping along under the shadow of the overhanging trees, held his course toward the dark point upon which stood the five sycamores.

At last, just as the sun was sinking below the horizon, he rounded the point, and, over a low piece of land, beheld the distant spars of the vessel he had left.

"I have found my way back, and I have discovered a secret by being lost in the lagoon," he muttered, as he pulled a strong and steady stroke in the direction of the schooner, which already had her white sails set to catch the breeze that, afar off, was seen rippling the blue waters.

As he touched the deck the sails filled and the schooner bent gracefully to the pressure of the wind and forged ahead, while the old man paced to and fro, strangely moody, the captain thought, for he could learn nothing from him regarding what he had seen ashore, and the cause of his remaining away so long a time.

CHAPTER XV.

PLOT AND COUNTERPLOT.

CAPTAIN MEREDITH was pacing his quarter-deck, gazing alternately at the town, and then at a schooner coming up the river under full sail, while ever and anon his eyes would fall upon a group of middies gathered in the waist, and talking earnestly together, Paul Martin and Heber Menken seeming to be the principal spokesmen.

"That craft is a Maine coaster, as sure as those middies are plotting some deviltry," he muttered, recognizing the rig and build of the coming schooner as an Eastern coaster, as quickly as he did that the youngsters in the waist were up to some mischief.

Since the duel he had been rather stern toward the middies, and they had avoided him as much as possible, while he had kept a close watch upon them to see if they treated their messmate, Merle, with disrespect.

As for Merle, he saw that he had not changed in his manner toward his shipmates, treating them as before with cool respect, excepting Bennett Ross and Lawrence Langley, toward whom he seemed more friendly than before the duel, and who certainly felt most kindly toward him.

The schooner, in the mean time, ran close inshore and let fall her anchor, and not five minutes after a boat with a single occupant left its side and came toward the Sea Wolf.

The boat was hailed, and the reply came back:

"Is that the Sea Wolf?"

"Ay, ay."

"I wish to come on board and see your captain."

"Let him come on board, Mr. Branscombe," called out Captain Meredith to his lieutenant, and a moment after a man came over the gangway and approached him.

It was the same old man who had gotten lost in the lagoon.

"Well, my man, how can I serve you?" asked the captain, kindly.

"It is for me, sir, to serve you," was the reply in a thin, shaky voice.

"Ah! in what way, pray?"

"This is an American cruiser?"

"It is."

"You would be anxious to capture a pirate?"

"By all means, for pirate-hunting is the special service my vessel was ordered upon."

"Do you know anything of Brandt, the Buccaneer, since his escape, and capture of the Baltimore packet ship?"

"Yes, he committed some high-sea robberies and murders, and then cleverly captured the revenue cutter, Sea Serpent."

"Indeed! I had not heard of this; but then I have been at sea some time, our schooner having cleared from Baltimore a month ago."

"Describe the cutter, please, captain."

"A low, black hull, with blue belt encircling her, and very tall, single sticks, with—"

"That is sufficient, sir, for I can tell you where to find that vessel."

"Ha! you know the whereabouts of Brandt?" cried the captain, excitedly.

"I know where his vessel lay at anchor, or rather moored to the bank, twenty-four hours ago, sir, and her commander, Brandt, the Buccaneer, is in the city, I have every reason to believe," and the old man told Captain Meredith of his adventure in the lagoon.

The result of this was the departure of the Sea Wolf down the river under full sail in less than half an hour after the arrival on board of the stranger.

Just as the Sea Wolf was gliding away from her anchorage, two men came down to the pier, opposite to which she had been anchored, and from one of them broke the cry:

"Great God, captain, look there!"

"Curses! it is the Sea Wolf rushing down the river," cried the other.

"True, and that ends our plot for the present."

"Yes, and may leave us without a craft, for her captain is no man to run off upon a

fool's errand. Come, Maurice, her destination is the cutter, so let us get your men at once, take boats, and gain the craft ahead of her, which we can do by rowing down the river to the bayous, and following them to Barrataria Bay by Lafitte's old route. Come, for once on board the cutter with your crew and mine, and we'll turn the tables on Captain Meredith and take the Sea Wolf."

The two men hastened away from the pier, and two hours after, just at dark, six large boats, crowded with men, and urged by a dozen oars, swept rapidly down the Mississippi to gain the Gulf by way of the bayous, which, like a network, cut up the southern shores of Louisiana.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE BOAT ATTACK.

"THIS wind holds so light, Maurice, that we will certainly beat the Sea Wolf to the lagoon," said Captain Brandt, no longer in his disguise, as he sat at the tiller of the leading boat, and spoke to Max Maurice, his lieutenant, following a short distance astern, as the heavily laden boats pulled with strong, steady strokes, through Bayou Dupont, on their way to Barrataria Bay, in a lagoon of which the captured cutter was concealed.

"Ay, ay, the wind is our friend, captain," answered the pirate lieutenant, who no longer looked the city merchant, but the handsome, dashing, but reckless young rascal he was, as he had discarded his padded suit of black, high hat and gold spectacles, for sailor attire.

"We'll give those Sea Wolves a surprise, if we do not manage to escape an attack, for if our guns are not as heavy, we can match them in men," continued Captain Brandt.

And all through the night the boats continued their southward way, the men constantly relieving each other at the oars, for each boat held over a score of men, and pulled from eight to a dozen sweeps.

In the bow of the leading boat crouched an Indian, the pilot, and unswervingly he held his way, never for a moment at a loss in the darkness and the numerous bayous they passed through, but following the main channel as a hound would a trail, with seemingly nothing but instinct to guide him.

The next day the lagoon was reached, and there lay the trim little cutter, safe as yet.

But Captain Brandt hastily threw his new crew on board, set them to drilling at the guns, and with his own men ahead in a boat began to tow out toward open water, for he well knew the danger of being caught in there.

It was dark as he reached the open bay,

and there, as he had feared, he beheld the Sea Wolf at anchor, and her boats coming on toward the lagoon he was just leaving.

They spied the cutter as soon as he did them, and pulled hard to head them off, for she was yet too landlocked to get the offshore breeze, and was barely moving through the waters.

"Give them the iron!" yelled Captain Brandt, and, in obedience to the order the iron hail of the cutter's broadside went flying toward the boats.

But not one of them was touched, and with loud cheers they came on rapidly, while the Sea Wolf's canvas was being set and her anchor hauled up in double-quick time.

"Curse the wind, there is not enough to give us good steerageway," cried Captain Brandt, as he saw how slowly the cutter answered her helm.

Again he gave the order to fire, and this time a crash followed, which showed one boat was hit.

It was the leading boat, and from it came in a youthful, but clear, ringing voice:

"The boat is sinking, lads, but yonder deck will hold us."

A cheer answered the words, and on came the boats, urged the more by the same voice crying:

"Pull! pull, for your lives, lads!"

"Small-arms, ahoy! Give it to them!" shrieked Brandt, the Buccaneer, as the leading boat, though settling fast, was almost upon the schooner.

Instantly a volley of small-arms followed, and shrieks, groans, curses, and then a heavy crash, all came together, for the boat had struck the schooner.

"Boarders ahoy!" yelled the same ringing voice, and upon the deck sprung the young officer, cutlass in hand, and at his back came a huge black form, followed by five seamen, all that remained alive out of the boat's crew.

"Hold! Let no man kill that boy, or black!" yelled Captain Brandt, as, by the flashes of the firearms, he recognized Merle and Mezrak as they boarded.

A score of weapons, leveled at the youth and Abyssinian, were instantly lowered, while Brandt sprung forward, and his blade crossed that of the young midshipman.

"Now, youngster, I claim my game!" hissed the pirate chief; but, as he spoke, two more boats struck the vessel, and two-score gallant tars sprung on board, with an irresistible impetus that sent the pirates back from the bulwarks and mixed up the combatants in deadly, hand-to-hand combats.

"Cut them down! We outnumber them two to one!" cried Brandt, while his lieutenant echoed his words.

But the pirates were, most of them, new

men, and the well-trained tars bore them back, while a fourth boat's crew, boarding, and the Sea Wolf rushing down toward the scene, Brandt the Buccaneer, felt that the battle was not to be won by him.

But he urged on his men with desperate courage, telling them to "hurl the honest dogs into the sea, and then seize the Sea Wolf."

But all to no purpose the few well-trained pirates fought, for their new shipmates were demoralized, and, after a few more minutes of hard fighting, the cutter was captured.

"Ho, the cutter!" cried Captain Meredith from the deck of the Sea Wolf, as she drew near.

No answer was returned, and then Merle called out:

"Where is Lieutenant Branscombe?"

"Dead, sir," replied a seaman.

"Ahoy! the Sea Wolf!" answered back the midgy.

"Do you need any aid?"

"No, sir; the cutter's ours!"

"Is that you, Monte?"

"Ay, ay, sir."

"Where is Branscombe?"

"Killed, sir."

"Then you take command of the cutter and bring her to anchor, and I will lay near you."

"Ay, ay, sir," and a few moments after, the cutter, which had now forged far enough out from the land to feel the breeze, was luffed up and her anchor let fall.

Quickly the Sea Wolf followed her example, and it was but a short time before Captain Meredith stepped on deck, and grasping the hand of Merle, said:

"Well, lad, you say poor Branscombe is dead?"

"Yes, sir; Midshipman Ross says he was killed before he left his boat."

"Was his the boat that got that hard hit and still held on and boarded first?"

"No, sir; that was my boat, and I am sorry to say but five men out of the eighteen that started with me are alive," said Merle, sorrowfully.

"Well, my lad, they have met a brave sailor's fate, and you have stepped another round up the ladder of promotion, for you took the cutter, and from greatly superior numbers, it seems," and Captain Meredith cast his eyes over the sullen group of prisoners standing in the cutter's waist and securely guarded.

"It was a short, but hard fight, sir, and would not have been won but for the prompt assistance of Midshipmen Ross and Langley and their crews," frankly said Merle.

"That's right, Mr. Monte, give your shipmates credit; and, Ross, you and Langley

shall not be forgotten, and I am glad I sent you two instead of Martin and Menken, who seemed so anxious to come.

"But now let me see this Captain Brandt, dead or alive, and if the latter, I'll pledge him my word he will not a second time escape."

At the words of the captain diligent search was made for Brandt, the Buccaneer.

Every man, living and dead, was closely scanned, but nowhere was to be found the chief.

Max Maurice, his lieutenant, lay forward, dying from a sword-thrust which Merle had given him, but the most thorough search only served to show that Brandt, the Buccaneer's star of destiny was still bright, and had not set in gloom.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE MUTINY.

THROUGH the darkness of the night the Sea Wolf and cutter lay near together, and a strong watch was kept upon the captured craft, while Merle was left in command.

With the break of day the dead were thrown into the sea, to find a sailor's grave, and the pirate prisoners were heavily ironed and put in the hold of the Sea Wolf, while further search was made for Brandt, the Buccaneer.

He was not among the dead, that was certain, for Merle, who knew his face well, had scanned every one of the slain ere they were tossed overboard.

He was certainly not in the sick-bay among the wounded, for all there had been stared at in the vain endeavor to find the missing chief.

His men said they had seen him a moment before the cry arose for quarter, and none remembered to have seen him after that.

"He doubtless slipped overboard and swam ashore," said Captain Meredith.

"That was an easy task, sir, and others may have gone with him, for the land is but half a mile distant," answered Merle, to whom the remark had been addressed.

"Well, I hope he has not drowned, for I hope to see him live to be hanged," and Captain Meredith laughed lightly.

"He will not drown, sir, for he was born to be hanged," said the old man whom the reader has before met.

"Ah, you here, Mr. Belden? Well, I must thank you for piloting us upon the enemy, and Midshipman Monte says you fought with marked gallantry in the attack on the cutter," said Captain Meredith.

"I tried to do my duty, sir, and only regret that Brandt escaped."

"But he shall not escape me always."

"You speak, Belden, as though you had

personal cause for hating the buccaneer chief?"

"I have, sir," and the old man turned away before the captain could say more, as though he cared not to be questioned upon the subject.

"That is a strange old customer, Monte, and somehow I think I have met him before; but, for the life of me, I cannot place him," said the captain.

"It seems to me also, sir, that I have met him before."

"Well, he did us a good turn, and though he appears to be poor, he has too much pride to accept a reward from me, which I told him I would give him if we captured the cutter. By the way, I wish I could leave you in command of the cutter to take her back to New Orleans, but I must give it to Lieutenant Graham, and you shall be his first luff, though neither of you seem to like each other very much."

Merle made no reply, but set about his duties, and an hour after the two vessels set sail and headed for the Mississippi Delta, on their way back to New Orleans.

But hardly had they gone a league when a severe storm swept over the Gulf, and the two vessels were soon lost to the sight of each other, as Lieutenant Graham had put the cutter away to scud before the gale, while the Sea Wolf lay to to ride out the blow.

Fearful of driving ahead too long on one course in that locality, Lieutenant Graham wore round, and stripping the cutter of all canvas let go the anchors.

The gale had spent itself, and the anchors held the little craft without dragging, and thus the night passed away.

With the morning land was visible off the port quarter, but the Sea Wolf was nowhere to be seen.

"Get up those anchors, Monte, and, as we are short of hands, set that lubberly ape of yours to work at the windlass," ordered Lieutenant Graham, in a tone that showed he would use his power, now that he was clothed in a little brief authority.

Merle silently obeyed, though he saw at once the officer was taking advantage of his position, which he held for the time being.

A word to Mezrak in the Persian tongue, and the black obeyed by going to the windlass, where his great strength and quickness made the men fly round nimbly.

Merle then went aft to attend to some duty, and Paul Martin took his place by the windlass, and he too showed that he was out from under his captain's eye, and under one of his own style, for he cursed the rapidly flying seamen, and yelled out to Mezrak:

"You great black imp, stir those bandy

legs of yours, or I'll spruce them up with the cat. Here, boatswain, give me that cat, that I may scratch the back of this great black devil's dog."

The boatswain silently handed over the instrument of torture, known as the "cat-o'-nine-tails,*" and the midshipman stepped nearer; too blind to see the look of fierce defiance that flashed in the eyes of the black.

Just then Merle returned, and Paul Martin continued his abuse of Mezrak with:

"If you don't stir that ugly body of yours, you imp of Hades, I'll lay the cat on."

Mr. Martin, my slave is working simply at my command, and it is not his duty, so kindly reserve your epithets and blows for those who deserve them," said Merle calmly.

"Ha! you teach the wretch insubordination do you? Well, Lieutenant Graham shall hear of this!" hissed Paul Martin, and he raised the cat as though to strike.

"Hold! I warn you not to lay the lash on the back of that man!" and Merle's voice rung out clear and determined.

Feeling that Lieutenant Graham would protect him, and unheeding the warning, the reckless middy brought the lash down hard on the back of the giant negro.

With a cry of an enraged hyena Mezrak sprung upon him, seized him in his powerful arms, and had not Merle reached forward and quickly spoken to the Abyssinian a few hasty words, then and there Paul Martin's career would have ended.

As the black hurled him from him, the now thoroughly frightened middy yelled lustily for help, until he felt he was now safe, and then he sung out:

"Ho! mutiny here, by the flag! Ho! men! seize that black hound and his white pet, and shoot them down if they resist!"

The men stood undecided, for they hated Paul Martin, and admired both Merle and his slave, and they knew that the reckless middy had provoked the trouble.

At bay, as it were, stood Merle and Mezrak, not knowing what might be done, and just then Lieutenant Graham, with a dozen men at his back, came rushing forward.

"There stand the mutineers," yelled Paul Martin, and without waiting to see who was in the wrong the officer charged upon Merle and the slave.

"Back, sir! I am no mutineer, nor is Mezrak, who punished that coward for a useless blow. Back I say!" cried Merle, while he drew his sword and stood on the defensive, and Mezrak seized a capstan bar and stood also at bay.

"Ha! this is indeed mutiny! Seize them,

*At that time in general use in the navy.

men, and cut them down if they resist," yelled the lieutenant.

"Hold! Lieutenant Graham, both Mezrak and myself will submit, if you do not put us in irons. We will let you make what report you please to Captain Meredith, and abide the result, if he decides against truth and justice; but do not urge the crew against us as though we were pirates at bay."

A score of voices half-cheered Merle's words, and, driven to frenzy at seeing the crew siding with him, Lieutenant Graham fairly shrieked:

"Seize them, I say, or cut down that mutineer midshipman and his black shadow!"

It was evident that he wished the latter order executed, that Merle and Mezrak could not tell their stories of the affair, and fearing to disobey, and urged on also by Paul Martin, the seamen rushed in a body upon the midshipman and his slave at bay.

"Don't let them kill us as they would cattle, Mezrak," cried Merle, and instantly he ran his sword through the breast of a seaman just in time to save his life, while, with one blow of the capstan-bar Mezrak laid three men upon the deck.

But before the youth could withdraw his blade from the body in which it was sheathed, and the slave once more raise his bar, a score of men were upon them, and borne to the deck by weight of numbers, they were soon overpowered and heavily ironed, greatly to the regret of both Lieutenant Graham and Paul Martin, who would gladly have had them slain.

CHAPTER XVIII.

DENOUNCED.

It was certainly an exciting time on board the cutter after the victory of the lieutenant and midshipman over Merle and Mezrak.

The affair had gone much further than either of the evil-disposed officers had wished, but having been pressed to a deadly and bitter alternative, they felt that they must brazen it out.

They had hoped to excite Merle into some act or word that he could be made responsible for to his commander; but the middy, when he struck Mezrak, had gone too far.

The seamen generally sympathized with Merle and his slave; but the very word of mutiny had such a terror for them, that they felt forced to uphold the officer in command even in his wrong-doing, rather than the one who had rebelled, even though right.

The vessel was held on her way toward the Southwest Pass, and poor Merle and Mezrak were kept in irons, while Lieutenant Graham, with his middy chum, discussed the affair over and over again.

"We've got to push them to the wall with

all our might, and it will end with their both going to the yard-arm for killing seamen," said the lieutenant.

Below decks, though in irons, neither Merle or Mezrak seemed wholly cast down.

"Well, Mezrak, this is a bad business we have gotten ourselves into," said Merle.

"Master, Mezrak does not care for himself, but for you."

"Never mind me, Mezrak, for I'll get out of the scrape, I guess."

"Master, I was mad, for I never was hit a blow before."

"I know it, my faithful friend, and now that affairs have gone as far as they have, I almost regret not allowing you to kill him for striking you. Other and better men were killed through his act, and as death had to follow, I wish he had gone under."

"Ah, master, you had better let me do the deed, and then I alone would have suffered; but as it is, you also are in irons. Oh! to think that I took oath to your noble father, that I would protect and care for you, and my very act has put irons upon your wrists. The thought maddens me!" and the face of the black worked with the feelings that seemed almost to overpower him.

"Don't speak of it, Mezrak; but I wish now we had lived on our island, and never sought to leave it. 'Twas my ambition to rise to a position, from a homeless boy, that has brought us to this."

"I suppose we will be strung up to the yard-arm, master?"

"Yes, I guess so."

"Why, you did not take life, for I alone did it."

"Your goodness of heart leads you to say so, Mezrak, for you know that I did take life, and I am guilty with you, and shall suffer with you, be the penalty what it may."

"And escape with me," said the slave, in a low tone, and the youth glanced quickly at him, but said nothing in reply, and a silence fell between them.

In due time, the breeze holding good, the cutter ran up the river, and dropped anchor in front of the Crescent City, the people of which were wild with excitement, for already had the Sea Wolf arrived, and the news of her capture was spread far and wide.

But, in the rejoicing at the capture of the cutter, all felt the deepest regret at the mysterious escape of the chief, Brandt, and many shook their heads and said he would again be heard of upon the high seas.

The name of Merle Monte was also circulating through the town, as having again distinguished himself, and Captain Meredith really felt most proud of his young *protege*, and signaled the cutter, as soon as she dropped anchor, for the midshipman to come on

board, little dreaming of the terrible trouble that had taken place.

"The captain has signaled for you to come on board, Monte, and the lieutenant bids me accompany you," said Midshipman Martin to Merle.

"And Mezrak?"

"Will go with you."

"Very well, we are ready."

"You'll not be so ready, when you know what is in store for you."

"It can be only death, and that I do not fear to meet," was the calm reply.

A boat was now alongside, and Lieutenant Graham was only too willing to have the midshipman go, and first tell his story of the affair.

Captain Meredith and several young officers stood watching the coming boat, but not until the midshipman and his slave came over the gangway in irons did they realize that something fearful had happened.

"Great God! you, Monte, in irons, and your slave too?"

"What means this?" cried Captain Meredith, turning deadly pale.

"Midshipman Martin, sir, has an explanation to make," said Merle, calmly.

"Speak, Martin! What means this?"

Martin's face flushed and then paled, while he stammered:

"A mutiny, sir."

"Mutiny?"

"Yes, sir."

"And what had Monte to do with a mutiny?"

"He was the ringleader, sir."

"A ringleader? Be careful, Mr. Martin, what words you utter," said Captain Meredith, sternly.

"It is true, sir."

"I do not believe it."

"But, Captain Meredith, I—"

"Silence, sir, for there are two sides to every story."

"Speak, Monte, what have you to say?"

"Midshipman Martin, Captain Meredith, has told the truth, for I am certainly guilty of causing trouble on board the cutter," said Merle firmly.

"Good Heaven! what trouble?"

"I did it, sir, and I alone am to blame!" came in the deep tones of Mezrak.

"Ah! you too in irons? Well, there has been trouble I see. Speak, Monte, and explain."

"We were getting up anchor, sir, and Mezrak here, had gone to the windlass, and was doing more than his share, when he was cursed by a midshipman, and instantly he resented the blow."

"Orders were given to shoot him down, but I have found him too true a friend to me,

not to try to help him, and the result was the death of several of the crew at our hands, and our being overpowered and put in irons as you see."

This frank confession of the mutineer midshipman seemed to move Captain Meredith, and others who heard it, deeply, and he cried earnestly:

"Oh, Monte! Monte! this is indeed a bad business. You and your slave have taken life, and I fear must suffer the direst punishment as mutineers, but I will sift this matter to the bottom, and those guilty of driving you to desperation shall not escape free, I pledge you. Remove these prisoners below decks, and see that they do not escape," ordered Captain Meredith sternly.

Then turning to an under officer, he said:

"Go on board the cutter, sir, and relieve Lieutenant Graham of command, telling him I wish him to report in person at once to me."

"Midshipman Martin, I wish to see you in my cabin."

Martin turned pale, and to help his cause all in his power, he sung out:

"Captain Meredith, there is another charge against Merle Monte, even more serious than mutineer, as I have proof of."

Merle turned quickly, as he was walking away, and said:

"Well, sir, what other charge than the one to which I plead guilty, do you dare bring against me?"

Captain Meredith seemed about to speak, when Midshipman Martin cried:

"I denounce Merle Monte as the son of Brandt, the Buccaneer."

CHAPTER XIX.

CONDEMNED.

No pen can describe the scene that followed the denouncing of Merle as the son of the buccaneer chief.

Captain Meredith started, and a cry escaped his lips.

A loud exclamation broke from the mouths of officers and seamen alike, and the eyes of all were riveted upon two persons, Merle and his accuser.

As for the one denounced, he turned livid, and for a moment his face seemed as though carved in marble.

Then there broke from him one cry:

"Liar!"

With the utterance of that one word, in irons as he was, he darted forward and sprung upon his accuser, and his manacles fell heavily in the face of Martin, dropping him to the deck as though every spark of life had been taken from him.

Once having given this blow, Merle be-

came calm, while Martin was quickly raised to his feet again and gazed in a dazed way at his commander.

"Mr. Martin, do you mean your words?" asked Captain Meredith.

"I do, sir," and he wiped the blood from the gash on his forehead made by the irons.

"You will take oath that you so believe?"

"I will, sir, and Midshipman Menken will bear me out in what I say."

"Midshipman Menken will also make the same charge?"

"He will, sir."

"Mr. Menken, you heard this youth denounced just now as the son of that sea-curse, Brandt?"

"I did, Captain Meredith," and Heber Menken stepped forward.

"Do you make the same charge?"

"I do, sir."

"You have reason to believe that you are right?"

"I have, sir."

"Then you and Mr. Martin will have to get your proof and appear before the tribunal that will try Mr. Monte for mutiny, and also investigate your accusation against his piratical parentage."

"Lead the prisoners below, and Mr. Martin, neither you or Mr. Menken are to leave the ship until I give you permission."

Captain Meredith then turned and entered his cabin, just as Lieutenant Graham arrived on board, feeling in no mood to meet his commander.

In a few words Midshipman Menken told him all that had occurred, and the lieutenant entered the cabin.

Closely did Captain Meredith question him on the mutiny and its causes, and though he felt sorry for Merle and Mezrak, and felt that they had been driven to the act, he knew that he must do his duty, and grieved that the young, handsome and gallant midshipman would have to end his promising career at the yard-arm.

As to the charge of Merle being the son of Brandt, the Buccaneer, Captain Meredith tried to dismiss it without a thought; but Lieutenant Graham told him he had heard strong hints of the kind himself, and he felt convinced that the two midshipmen who made the startling accusation could bring proofs.

"It will take the strongest proofs to convince me, Graham, and I believe it is their hatred that has caused them to listen to idle rumors about the boy, simply because his past life seems to be one of mystery and romance, and he has plenty of money to spend."

"As for the mutiny, I no more uphold him in that than I do you and Martin for

driving the negro to frenzy, and thus causing Monte to strike in his defense.

From that moment a gloom seemed to fall upon the ship, and it was evident to all that Lieutenant Graham and Midshipmen Menken and Martin were more nervous about the approaching trial of Merle and Mezrak than they were themselves.

At last the day of trial came round, and the officers of several vessels in port were on the court-martial.

Pale, but calm, Merle appeared before them, and Mezrak showed no interest whatever in the affair.

The stories of Lieutenant Graham and Midshipman Martin were told in a nervous, but frank manner, and were attentively listened to.

Then the seamen who were on the cutter told what they knew about the mutiny, and it was evident to all that the honest tars tried to smooth over the affair for Merle and Mezrak.

Merle was then heard, and Mezrak also, and they had only to confess their guilt, as far as the killing of their shipmates was concerned, and then tell what had driven them to it.

The death of the seamen at their hands none would, or could deny, and they were at once condemned as mutineers to suffer the full penalty of the crime.

"What have you to say, Midshipman Monte, why you should not suffer death?" asked the judge advocate.

"Nothing, sir, for I know that I did wrong," was the cool reply.

"Then, sir, the decision of this court is that you be at once cashiered from the service of your country, and in ten days' time that you be strung up to the yard-arm as a mutineer, there to hang until you are dead, and may Heaven have mercy upon your guilty soul."

Merle bowed and resumed his seat, while the death sentence was also passed upon Mezrak, who actually smiled as the judge advocate completed his words.

"Now, Captain Meredith, we will examine into this second charge against the condemned man, which accuses him of being the son of the Gulf Scourge, Brandt, the Buccaneer."

"Yes, sir; his accusers are Midshipmen Menken and Martin," answered Captain Meredith, and Paul Martin was placed upon the witness stand.

In a few words, and in a far more straightforward way than that in which he had told of the mutiny, he spoke of his meeting, while with Midshipman Menken, a sailor in the restaurant up town, and the accidental hearing that Merle was a buccaneer's son, and

had been himself in early boyhood life, a pirate on board his father's vessel.

Menken then told the same story, and yet the sailor who had told them the secret could not be found.

There were many to believe all that was evil against the poor boy, while a few others felt for him in the iron chain of a cruel destiny, which held him in bondage forever.

CHAPTER XX.

MAN OVERBOARD.

THERE was one thing that Captain Meredith got done for Merle and Mezrak, and that was his time of execution postponed until he could send an officer to Washington, and get a response from the Secretary of the Navy.

Lawrence Langley was the midshipman selected for this duty, and, as there were no railroads in those days to whirl a messenger northward in less than a week's time to Washington from New Orleans, he took a packet-ship sailing for Baltimore, the day after the sentence was passed upon the mutineer midshipman and his slave.

In his letter to the Secretary, Captain Meredith had earnestly urged the early life of Merle, his gallant services, love for Mezrak, and the provocation of officers who were envious of him, and had entreated a pardon from the President for the boy and his slave, even though the youth was dismissed from the service.

Lawrence Langley made a rapid run on, and presented his dispatches and letters in due time; but almost immediately was he sent back, and the words of the Secretary, after an interview with the President, told the young midshipman that there was no hope for poor Merle, for the distinguished official had said:

"Now, sir, hurry away, and you'll catch the outward-bound packet which leaves Baltimore in the morning, and I sincerely hope that the fate to be visited upon that hot-tempered youth will be a warning to the young men of our service to understand that they must learn to command themselves before they do others."

Lawrence Langley had of late taken a great fancy to Merle, and it was with a heavy heart that he set out upon his return.

Upon reaching the ship, he was delighted to see a young officer also in naval uniform, and at once introduced himself.

He found his companion to be Passed Midshipman Roy Vernon, who was on his way to join his vessel at Havana, intending, he said, to take another ship from New Orleans to that port.

The very first day out the middies became fast friends, and greatly enjoyed the sail out

of the harbor, with the frowning fortress of McHenry on their starboard, and the green hills of Catonville far beyond.

Down the beautiful Chesapeake swept the stately and fast-sailing craft, and by the time she had dropped Cape Henry astern, and was dashing through the waters of the Atlantic, the two midshipmen appeared to have known each other from infancy, the bond of being sons of the sea seeming to bind them together in indissoluble chains of friendship.

Roy Vernon told Lawrence Langley all about himself, and how he hoped to be an admiral some day, and win a name second only to Paul Jones, while Midshipman Langley seemed less ambitious, and would be content to become a Decatur or a Preble.

But he told of his career too, and of the sad fate that was to befall a shipmate for mutiny, that had been forced upon him.

He found in Midshipman Vernon a most sympathetic friend indeed, and the two youthful sailors were wont to pace the deck every night until a late hour, talking over the misfortune of poor Merle, and hoping against hope that something might yet save him.

The day before the ship reached the Delta of the Mississippi, a severe storm struck her, which held on into the night, and the two young friends remained on deck, anxious to be ready to lend their aid to the captain and crew should it be needed.

Suddenly, above the storm arose the thrilling and startling cry:

"Man overboard."

At once all was excitement, and yet nothing could be done to aid the unfortunate man.

Soon it appeared that it was Lawrence Langley, and the story of his loss was soon told by his messmates.

The two had been standing together aft, when a huge wave struck the ship, boarded, rushed along the deck with irresistible force, and when it had passed, Roy Vernon discovered that his friend was gone, and at once gave the cry of alarm, though he knew nothing could be done to save him.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE MIDDY'S MISSION.

CAPTAIN MAYO MEREDITH paced the deck of the Sea Wolf, watching the running in to her anchorage of a clipper-ship, which he knew to be one of the passenger vessels between the ports of New Orleans and Baltimore, and a sister craft to the one in which Lawrence Langley had sailed some time before.

Although he hoped his messenger would come with all due haste, he hardly dared hope

that he had been able to catch, on the return voyage, the vessel coming in.

But seeing, after she reached her anchorage, that a boat was coming toward the cruiser, having just put off from the clipper, and an officer in uniform was in the stern-sheets, he muttered:

"By Neptune! Langley has made it.

"God grant that the President pardoned the poor boy!"

Soon the boat reached the side of the Sea Wolf, and a young officer ascended the gangway and approached Captain Meredith.

Raising his cap politely, he said:

"Do I address Captain Meredith, sir?"

"You do."

"I am Passed Midshipman Roy Vernon, and have dispatches for you, sir, from the Secretary of the Navy."

"Ah! Mr. Vernon, I am glad to meet you; but I sent dispatches of a most important nature on by Midshipman Lawrence Langley."

"Alas! sir, he will never return!"

"What!" and Captain Meredith was greatly surprised.

He was returning with me, sir, when he was lost overboard, three nights ago, in a storm."

"Poor, poor Langley! this is indeed most sorrowful tidings you bring; but tell me, Mr. Vernon, of the dispatches you bring me," and Captain Meredith led the way into the cabin, the middy following him.

"Well, sir, what have you for me?" and Captain Meredith, halting, motioned the young officer to a seat, and, throwing himself into his own easy-chair, held forth his hand for the dispatches.

Two large sealed envelopes were handed to him, and breaking the seal, Captain Meredith glanced over the contents, while he looked troubled.

"Are you acquainted with the nature of these dispatches, Mr. Vernon?"

"I am, sir."

"Then you are aware that Mr. Langley's trip was useless?"

"Yes, sir."

"The President not only refuses to pardon poor Monte, but orders him sent, with his slave, on to Washington?"

"Yes, sir."

"And you are to take charge of him?"

"I am, sir."

"He says nothing of guards?"

"I have men with me, sir, now on board the clipper."

"Ah, yes; well, when do you propose sailing?"

"The next clipper-packet goes in two days, sir, and I would like to return in her."

"You can do so, Mr. Vernon, and when you are ready to receive the prisoner I will turn him over into your charge."

"And the slave, sir?"

"Oh, yes, and Mezrak, too, of course."

Respectfully declining the captain's invitation to make the Sea Wolf his home while in port, Roy Vernon went ashore and put up at a hotel.

But, several hours before the sailing of the clipper-ship, he was on board the Sea Wolf, accompanied by four marines, to receive his prisoners.

The long stay between decks had taken the color from Merle's face, but he was stern and fearless looking, and Mezrak wore the same air of utter indifference to his fate which had characterized him from the first.

Captain Meredith bade both Merle and Mezrak a sorrowful farewell, and there were many sad faces among the crew, at sight of seeing the brave youth going to his death.

They were soon on board the clipper, the anchor was dragged out of the muddy bottom of the Mississippi, and the vessel spread her snowy canvas and sped down the river on her northward voyage, while Roy Vernon paced her deck and gazed listlessly at the shore, and Merle, in the gloom that surrounded him, pondered bitterly over his fate.

CHAPTER XXII.

A WELL-PLANNED PLOT.

THE good ship Reindeer had begun to feel the swell of the Gulf, and was bowling merrily along, having discharged her pilot an hour before, when Roy Vernon, who stood talking to her captain on the quarter-deck, suddenly started, and with a hasty ejaculation darted into the cabin.

The surprised captain wondered at his strange departure, and a moment after the midshipman returned.

"Captain Mortlake, you must hail yonder fishing smack for me, sir, as I just find I have come off without my dispatches, having left them at my hotel."

"I hope we are not going to lose you for the voyage, Mr. Vernon," said the captain.

"I am sorry, sir, but it is imperative."

"Indeed! and your prisoners?"

"Must return with me."

"Then you wish me to signal the smack?"

"I do, sir."

The fishing vessel, a mile distant, and standing briskly down toward the Reindeer, was at once signaled to head so as to meet the clipper ship.

For awhile it seemed as though she was not going to notice the order; but soon after she altered her course, and in fifteen minutes more she was near enough to hail.

"Ho, the smack!" shouted Roy Vernon, in seamanlike tones.

"Ay, ay, the clipper!" came back in a gruff voice.

"I wish you to run me back to New Orleans."

"For gold I will," was the reply.

"All right; you shall have it."

"I want a cool hundred."

"A hundred and fifty, if you wish."

"All right; luff up, and I'll run close in."

The clipper was soon luffed up with the wind and lay to, and the smack stood close in until a line was cast to secure her.

Upon the decks of the smack two old men and one boy were visible, and the craft looked as though her crew had had bad luck with fishing.

The transfer of Vernon and his prisoners was soon made, and regretting to lose a young comrade who had proven himself an agreeable companion, the captain of the clipper held on his course, while the smack put back toward the Delta of the Mississippi.

Upon boarding the smack, Merle and Mezrak had been placed in the small cabin, and there they had remained but half an hour when Roy Vernon entered.

"Well, Midshipman Monte, I think I have done a most clever trick," he said, with a smile.

"What is that, sir?" asked Merle.

"I have saved you and your slave from the yard arm."

"Saved us?" asked Merle, in surprise.

"Yes."

"I do not understand."

"You are a mutineer?"

"I was."

"In that mutiny you and your slave killed several men?"

"We were so unfortunate."

"You were tried for your crime?"

"Yes."

"Found guilty?"

"Yes."

"And sentenced to death at the yard-arm?"

"Yes."

"Captain Meredith got the execution put off until he could send an officer to Washington?"

"So he told me."

"The officer did no good?"

"So I have been told."

"Well, sir, had that officer reached New Orleans with the dispatches he bore, ere this you would have been dead."

"But you brought dispatches?"

"I brought what was taken as such; but my dear Monte, the papers I took to Captain Meredith were forged!"

"Forged?"

"Don't look so startled."

"You astound me."

"A mutineer astounded at forgery?"

"You forget you insult a prisoner in irons who is unable to resent your words."

"True; I beg pardon."

"But I repeat, those dispatches were forgeries."

"Explain, please."

"Well, Midshipman Monte, I am a clever hand with the pen, and I erased with acids the writing of those dispatches and wrote in what I wished."

"But why?"

"To save you."

"But how could you save me?"

"My orders, or rather those I wrote for myself, were to the effect that I should bring you in irons to Washington, there to be put to death."

"Now, the real orders were that you should at once be executed, as an example to the young men of the service."

"But why have you done this?" asked the astonished Merle.

"I serve a master."

"A master?"

"Yes."

"Who is he?"

"You will soon see him."

"What interest has he in me?"

"A great interest, for he would not see you die, unless by his hand."

"Ah, he is a foe?"

"Certainly."

"You speak in mysterious tones."

"I'll try and explain:

"Midshipman Langley was sent North with dispatches, and my master ordered me to go upon the same vessel."

"And you did?"

"Certainly; for I always obey orders."

"Well, I formed the acquaintance of Midshipman Langley, and we became good friends on the trip North, and he was very kind to me, for then I wore feminine attire."

"Ha!"

"You read my secret."

"You are a woman?"

"I am."

"Go on with your story."

"Well, I got from Langley all he was going for, and I determined to return with him, for that was what I was sent for."

"In this disguise, and under the name of a midshipman I once knew, I came back with Langley, and we became fast friends."

"I tried to get him to join me in a plot to save you, and he indignantly refused, and threatened to betray me to the captain and have me put in irons for the rest of the voyage."

"I saw that he was in earnest, as soon as the storm was over, and then I determined to act, so I threw him into the sea."

"Great God!"

"I did it to save myself, you know, Monte."

"Well, the day after I got hold of his dispatches, altered them to suit myself, and then determined to play the bold game, which has gotten you into my power, along with your slave here."

"The guards?"

"Are my men."

"And where are you going now?"

"Well, back to the city."

"And your motive in saving me?"

"I leave that for my master to tell you, I may say my husband, for he is on board, having chartered this fishing smack for the very purpose of heading off the Reindeer."

As the daring person who had played such a strange part ceased speaking, she arose, and a man entered the cabin.

One glance into that bold, handsome face, and Merle Monte, in spite of his nerve and habitual calm, uttered a cry, for he saw before him none other than *Brandt, the Buccaneer*.

CHAPTER XXIII.

DEFIED AND DEFEATED.

"WELL, my lad, I am about the last man you expected, or cared to see just now?" said Brandt the Buccaneer, in a pretended tone and manner of friendship, as he entered the cabin.

"Yes, I was in hopes you were at the bottom of the sea," was the bold reply.

"No such bad luck for me, or good luck for you."

"So it seems."

"Well, I have saved you from the yard-arm."

"Why?"

"I had a good motive."

"You evidently played a bold and successful game."

"Oh, that was the woman's game."

"She is my wife, as she doubtless told you, but one who, believing me false to her, sought to kill me; but, as usual, Satan looked after his own and saved me."

"She fell into my power, and with threats to kill her child I made her do the clever work of getting you free, and she has won her freedom and the life of her child thereby, and I will land them and let them go their way."

"And my slave and myself?" asked Merle.

"How do you mean?"

"What is to be our fate?"

"That depends upon yourselves."

"Well?"

"You are free to go where you please when you have done what I demand."

"And that is—"

"That you tell me a secret."

"Ah! I know now all that you wish."

"It is to find the treasure I know your father, Montezuma, possessed, and which that black hid on some island, where the yacht was wrecked, and where you were brought up."

"Well, you will never know."

"You mean it?"

"I do."

"I will give you your life, and let you take half the treasure."

"No."

"I will torture you to death if you refuse."

"I refuse."

An impatient oath escaped the lips of the man, and he turned to Mezrak.

"You will not be so foolish?" he said.

"Mezrak has no fear of death," was the quiet reply of the slave, who had been a silent, but attentive listener to all that had passed.

"But you have of torture?"

Mezrak shook his head.

"If you do not tell I will torture you both until you shriek forth in your agony the secret I would know."

"Try us," said Merle, contemptuously.

"Boy, see what you throw away!"

"I know."

"That treasure is worth millions, for I know well its value."

"And so do I."

"Half of it will give you a fortune beyond that of a prince, and you can go to Europe and remain until you grow to manhood, and then no one will know you as the mutineer midshipman, and you can revel in your gold."

"You are brave, for I remember well your courage; and my vessel would not have been taken that night but for your daring."

"Thank you."

"You need not thank me, for I speak but the truth."

"I tried to beat you back, for I did not wish to kill you as I could have done, for the secret of the treasure would die with you; but you fought like an enraged tiger and finding my vessel was lost, I slipped into the sea, followed by a few men, and swam ashore."

"I hoped you had drowned."

"No, I guess I was born to be hanged; but we will see."

"Now tell me, do you and this black slave refuse to divulge the secret of where

lies that island where your treasure is buried?"

"I do."

"And the master knows well that no torture can wring from me the secret," answered Mezrak.

"Well, we shall see."

"Yes!"

"Now my plan is to run this craft back to New Orleans, and first set Victorie, my wife, and her child free, for I shall keep my word to her, as she so cleverly got you into my power."

"It will be the first act of justice you were ever guilty of, I'll warrant," said Merle, boldly.

"It shall be the last."

"But to my story. After I have disposed of her, I shall cut out the cutter again, and set sail in her, for I have a comrade now getting me a good crew, and in her I shall put to sea, carrying you and Mezrak with me."

"If so you will then, we will head for the Treasure Island, and I will keep my word with you."

"If you refuse, then I shall again hoist the black flag, and you will be responsible for the red deeds of Brandt the Buccaneer."

"Oh, my conscience will not trouble me for your acts!"

"But you will regret not doing as I ask you."

"Bah! I will regret nothing."

"The envy and hatred of several brother officers made me a mutineer, and I have been tried and sentenced for my crime, and poor Mezrak with me."

"You have succeeded in getting us into your power, through the plot of a clever woman, who ruined—ay, murdered—poor Langley to save her child from your cruelty, and you threaten me with death if I refuse to divulge the secret of where my treasure lies hidden."

"Branded as a mutineer, I care not for life, so your threats of death hold no terror for me."

"But torture shall."

"No, you cannot force my lips to speak, and Mezrak you will find even more firm than I."

"Well, your escape will soon be known, and I shall spread it around that you are indeed *my son*, and that *I* aided you to escape."

"Then I shall let it be known that *you* cut the cutter out, and that *I*, Brandt the Buccaneer, was killed, and that you, Merle Montezuma, are the pirate whose red deeds will spread terror the world over."

"No, no, you will not, bad as you are, do *this*!" cried Merle.

"It is just what I shall do, boy."

"Piracy is about ended on the high seas, and in a year longer, perhaps a shorter time, a black flag will not be found upon the waters."

"But I know well the seas, and for a long time I will elude all pursuit and run my red way until I have gained treasure enough to live on; but, mark me, boy, *you* will be believed to be the pirate, for the world will not know that you and your black slave are chained to the floor of my cabin, dying by inches."

"Now you know what to expect, so talk with the black and decide what you will do."

"Master has no need to ask Mezrak, for he knows what is in my heart."

"Bravo, Mezrak," cried Merle.

"If master wishes to save his life, let him tell where lies the island, but the lips of Mezrak will never speak the secret, nor the hands of Mezrak hold the tiller that guides a vessel there that is not commanded by my master."

Merle said simply:

"You have heard, Sir Pirate."

With a bitter oath Brandt arose and left the cabin.

CHAPTER XXIV.

A DOUBLE SURPRISE.

It was but ten days after the sailing of the clipper-ship, in which the pretended Midshipman Roy Vernon had sailed with his prisoners, when one of the line of vessels came up the river, and dropped anchor in front of the city.

It was evident that the vessel had been in collision with another craft, as her bows were badly stove in, and her bulwarks shattered.

Soon it became known that she had collided in a dense fog with the outward going clipper-ship of the same line, and that the other vessel had been so badly damaged that she sunk soon after, though all the passengers were saved and brought back to port.

Alarmed at the report, Captain Meredith visited the vessel to ascertain some news regarding Merle and Midshipman Vernon.

He soon returned on board the *Sea Wolf* with a troubled face, for he had learned of the mysterious departure of the midshipman, his prisoners and guard.

As he had delivered the dispatches in person to the pretended midshipman, he knew that he could not have left them.

And why had they not come back to the city?

The weather had been fair, the smack when bearded, near the Delta, and she should have returned a week before.

Then Captain Meredith read over his dispatches, and by examining them carefully he saw that the seals and paper had been tampered with.

Holding the paper up to a light, he discovered erasures, and at once he knew something was wrong.

Going ashore, he heard a startling rumor, that it was reported how Brandt, the Buccaneer, had, by a most clever ruse, rescued his son from the clipper ship.

Returning on board the Sea Wolf, Captain Meredith ordered his senior lieutenant to go on board the cutter, which was lying near, and instantly fit her out for sea, while he would see that a crew was enlisted for her in the town.

The officer obeyed his orders with alacrity, and in three days' time the pretty and warlike little Sea Serpent was ready to sail, and all that was needed was the coming on board of her crew which had been enlisted for her.

Then, to add still more to the chagrin of Captain Meredith, a vessel arrived with the mails and brought dispatches from Washington saying that it was hoped by the Government that the death sentence on Merle, the mutineer midshipman, had been immediately carried out upon the return of Midshipman Lawrence Langley, with orders to that effect.

Then Captain Meredith knew that he had been cruelly deceived by Roy Vernon, and felt that after all Merle had been rescued by Brandt, the Buccaneer, who must be, as rumor said, the father of the youth.

For Merle's sake, loving the boy as he did, he was glad that he had escaped death; but yet he dreaded, with such a father, what the boy's future might be.

The next day the Sea Serpent was to receive her full complement of men and set sail, and Captain Meredith went to his cabin to prepare his dispatches.

It was a nasty night on the river, for the wind was blowing hard, and a driving mist made the vessels in the stream invisible even at their own length away.

Suddenly there were loud voices heard on deck, and hastily ascending, Captain Meredith had another surprise.

A boat belonging to a merchant craft had just come alongside, and the mate in it, who was returning from the shore on board his vessel, had seen half a dozen boats, crowded with men, suddenly board the cutter lying the eighth of a mile down the river, cut her cables and set sail, while on board were heard angry voices, then orders and the clash of steel.

"Ho, men, ahoy! all hands to make sail!" yelled the captain, and in spite of the storm

the Sea Wolf was at once a busy scene of action.

But ere she swung loose, to start in pursuit, another boat ran alongside, and in it was the officer who had commanded the cutter, and the half-score of men who were with him.

In a few words his story was told, of how he had been in his cabin, when suddenly he was confronted by half a dozen masked men.

He had resisted and called to his men; but the fight was too unequal, the cables had been cut, and the vessel was under sail and headed down-stream, with over sixty pirates on board.

He had been hustled into a boat, with his men, and told to pull for the cruiser, with the information to Captain Meredith that Merle, the mutineer midshipman, was captain of the Sea Serpent, and he would sail under the black flag in future, as he had been condemned to death under the Stars and Stripes.

"Did Merle Monte give you this message for me?" asked Captain Meredith, in a trembling voice.

"No, sir, but he sent an officer to me with the message," was the reply.

"Did you see Merle Monte?"

"I did, sir."

"He was then the chief?"

"He was in the cabin, and Mezrak was with him, sir."

"As we stood near the cabin-companion-way, while my men were getting into the boat, the pirate officer who had charge of me said:

"There is our young chief, and he'll make a fearful name upon the sea."

"I looked into the cabin, and my eyes fell upon the mutineer midshipman."

"There was no mistake?"

"None, sir."

"Poor, misguided boy; well, let us go in pursuit at once," said the captain, sadly.

And down the river, through the darkness and storm, sped the Sea Wolf, in chase of the captured cutter, now over a league ahead.

But when the dawn broke the cruiser found that the cutter had gained greatly, and none on board the Sea Wolf ever saw the little craft again.

Some said she was sunk on a reef, others that she was none other than the Floating Feather, a pirate craft that was the last keel over which the black flag floated in the Gulf of Mexico.

But what really became of the Sea Serpent, and what fate befell Merle, the Boy Cruiser, is told in the story known as "Merle's Island Treasure."

THE END.

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